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THE HARRISES

THE HARRISES

BEING

AN EXTRACT FROM THE COMMONPLACE-BOOK OF
ALEXANDER SMITH, THE ELDER

"We see the very wreck that we must suffer;
And unavoided is the danger now,
For suffering so the causes of our wreck."
—RICHARD II.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.



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PREFACE.

It has been my habit, throughout a long life, to keep what can hardly be called a diary—because very little is recorded therein relating to myself—but a sort of commonplace-book, wherein, from time to time, I have entered the heads or outlines of the histories of such of my acquaintances as had any history attaching to them at all.

I believe that I was originally induced to fall into this custom by observing the care with which my old and respected friend, John Ramsay of Ochertyre, adhered to it. What his executors may have done with the many manuscript volumes of 'Rural Biography' which used to crowd

his book-shelves, is more than I can say. But I well remember the eagerness with which that worthy man and eminent scholar and antiquary used to take down from its place one or other of these volumes, and read therefrom, as often as he could get a patient listener, much that wearied, and a good deal that interested and amused. Nor was it on me exclusively, then a mere youth and his occasional visitor, that he was wont to confer this favour. The late Lord Woodhouselee, Professor Robison of Edinburgh, Dr Gregory, Dr Gleig of Stirling, Dr Doig, second to no Scotchman of his day for scholarly erudition,—these, with many more of like standing in the world of letters, drank often from the same Castalian spring; appearing on each occasion to be most refreshed when their host arrived at the epitaph—a species of composition in which he piqued himself on having attained perfection, and which, either because it was perfect in itself, or that it brought the day's reading to a close,

never failed to receive from his auditors very hearty commendation. . .

Looking over some of the earlier of these my records, I lighted, not long ago, upon the skeleton of the following history. Were I, as my old friend was, master of a modest mansion on the Teith ; had I the same *salictum*^e, or willow-grove, that he had, or one akin to it[^], wherein to receive my guests, I might have gathered round me an audience small, but select, and delivered my own soul as he used to deliver his. But in the absence of these temptations to a more quiet sederunt, it occurred to me that it might not be amiss to clothe the bones with flesh and fibre, and to let the narrative fight its own way to such reception as the public might be disposed to concede to it. And here it is.

Possibly one or two of my contemporaries may still survive. If any such there be in the land of the living, it is further possible that they may recognise a few, at least, of the originals from

which these copies are taken. But I do not on that account experience any apprehension that private feeling will be wounded by what is set down here, or the interests or social status of any human being injuriously affected. All the actors in my drama, whether principal or subordinate, have long gone to their account ; and the noble family, of which the patronymic is, of course, a misnomer, probably never heard, in the present generation, of what the generation that preceded them did and suffered.

What the moral of my tale may be, I leave each of my readers to make out for himself, being content to subscribe myself his hearty well-wisher,

ALEXANDER (more generally known
as SANDY) SMITH, the Elder.

BOOK FIRST.

THE HARRISES.



BOOK FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

“DEATH, WHERE IS THY STING?”

THE curtain rises, and we look in upon a chamber over which the angel of death seems to be spreading out his wings. It is dimly lighted by the rays of a solitary candle, which, doubtless of set purpose, has been removed to a distant corner of the room; and by the dull flickering of a fire, in front of which, with their backs to the foot of the bed, two gentlemen, both in the prime of manhood, are sitting. They appear to be bowed down with grief, though the attitude of the elder of the two is more abject than that of the younger; and both are motionless and silent.

Apart from them and on the further side of the bed, a woman large and muscular occupies an easy-chair. She is evidently a hired nurse, for, with the indifference incident to her calling, she dozes in her seat, waking up from time to time to do nothing. The chamber, a room of moderate dimensions, is sufficiently without being elegantly furnished. Across the window which faces the door, clean white dimity curtains are drawn. On one side of the fireplace, in the recess between the chimney-piece and the wall, stands a mahogany wardrobe, and on the other a wash-hand stand also mahogany, and surmounted with marble. The walls are neatly but not expensively papered; the floor is covered with a Brussels carpet, and the bed itself has its plain white dimity hangings, which, however, are carefully gathered up at this moment into two knots, so as to impede as little as possible the free circulation of air. Silence the most profound prevails in that chamber, broken only by that short, sharp, spasmodic breathing which tells of a spirit struggling, and struggling hard, to free itself from

the burden of the flesh. For on the bed, between which and the fireplace the two gentlemen are sitting, lies one, about whom the medical attendant, before taking his leave only ten minutes ago, had pronounced that he could be of no further use to her. He had exhausted his skill, he had done all that man could do ; she was in God's hands now ; his presence was no longer necessary. O doom of dread ! if it be spoken in our hearing over some one who has been to us no more than an everyday friend and acquaintance ! O terrible sentence ! when the one dear life seems to be struck at by it, which is more closely linked with our own than all in God's creation besides. Who that has ever heard it so pronounced can forget, let him live as long as he may, the deadening, stupefying, altogether incomprehensible influence which it exercised over his whole moral being when first he tried to take it in ? Who does not remember, that not till after an interval of days, or possibly of weeks, the full measure of all that was involved in it came home to him ; when the future and the present alike had lost

their interest for him, and brooding continually over the past, he felt that for him the light of life was gone out for ever? O doom of dread! heard that night by men who, hearing, seemed not to understand, but sat them down again without a word spoken, without a tear shed, to gaze with vacant stare into the grate. It is an awful scene, and yet how continually repeated!

The short, sharp, spasmodic breathing went on for an hour or more after the medical attendant had taken his departure. The nurse had risen once or twice to moisten the lips of the breather, when suddenly the stupor into which the two gentlemen seemed to have fallen was broken, and both sprang to their feet and faced round. Raising herself slowly on her elbow the dying woman spoke. How beautiful she was! how unearthly! with the deep pink fever-flush upon her cheek, and those large lustrous eyes opened to their fullest stretch. She spoke, but not in our English tongue. What she said was of little moment except to herself, and possibly to these two men, both of whom understood her.

"Do you not hear the music? Is it not divine?" That was all.

"God may be gracious to us yet," exclaimed the younger of the two, in a low eager whisper: "watch you beside her, while I go and fetch Dr Sumner. If human skill can avail at all, you know that we shall find it in him."

"Yes, yes," was the reply, "but consider——"

"Consider! no. I'll consider nothing now except to save her if we can."

So saying, he stole softly but swiftly out of the room, threw a cloak round his shoulders, and let himself out at the front door. It was a keen cold night in January; the snow lay thick on bush, shrub, and lawn, and covered the tops of the houses with an incrustation of sparkling silver. The air was very still; and clear and bright in a cloudless sky the moon was shining. He descended at a single bound the flight of steps which led down to a little garden or enclosure. Through this he hurried, and, unlocking a gate in the wall beyond, emerged into a road on either side of which a row of detached villas had just

begun to be erected. Along this he ran, his footfalls making amid the thick snow little or no sound ; and he himself regardless of every object before or about him, except that his eye sought eagerly in all directions for a hackney-coach. None, however, was discernible either near or far away, so he rushed forward at the top of his speed, turned sharp to his right, and found himself by-and-by where the suburbs began to lose themselves in the town. "My God! my God!" he cried aloud, "are they all gone home, just at this moment when life and death hang in the balance!" He forgot that the place which he had left behind was far removed from coach-stands. But fortune favoured him more than he had any right to expect. Just as he gave utterance to this bitter cry, a post-chaise, returning, it seemed, from some distant journey, overtook him, and he eagerly hailed it. The promise of a handsome *douceur* induced the driver to make light of his own fatigue and the fatigue of his horses. The door was opened, the steps let down, and as fast as the jaded brutes

could be constrained to move, the carriage made its way to Green Street.

To spring out, to ring the bell violently, and warn the post-boy that he must be ready to undertake another journey, were all the work of a moment. While he waited for the door of the house to be opened, the bells of a hundred churches began to strike. It is astonishing how the striking of the clock affects our minds when they are wound up to a pitch of painful anxiety. A superstitious dread creeps over us that if the brazen tongues speak on beyond some assigned limit, evil will surely befall ; if the knell stop just where we desire it to stop, the issue may be favourable. The gentleman standing on the door-step in Green Street cast his destiny on that issue. But before the issue could be settled the door opened, and his thoughts were diverted into another channel. Dr Sumner was at home and in bed. A card, bearing the name of his nocturnal visitor, was sent up, and in a few minutes the Doctor made his appearance buttoning his coat, and otherwise evincing symptoms of eager haste.

“For heaven’s sake, what is it?”

“Don’t stop to ask questions now, but come with me. A post-chaise stands at the door, and I will tell you everything as we go along. Come at once, and save her life if you can, which is hanging on a thread.”

They entered the chaise together. The post-boy turned round, and drove as he was directed, overhearing, of course, no part of the conversation which passed between the gentlemen inside. But that it had deeply interested the Doctor was evident from the expression of his countenance when the bright moonlight fell upon it as they alighted.

“Is there any hope?” was the question then put.

“While there’s life there’s hope; but the case, as you describe it, is not one of promise.”

By this time the chaise was dismissed. The gate in the garden-wall was opened, and the two men were crossing the lawn together. Sharp ears had caught the sound of wheels, muffled though it was in the snow, and upon the landing-place and

in the open doorway stood the watcher to receive them.

"Save her, Doctor — oh save her! — and I will fall down and worship you."

"It is not for me to save or to kill. Where is she?"

They ascended the stairs and entered the sick-room, where again the absolute silence was broken only by the same short, sharp, spasmodic breathing which had broken it an hour before. The patient had again become prostrated; the eyelids were drooped over the eyes, the balls of which seemed to be turned upwards, for only the whites were visible. The Doctor looked down and shook his head. "You have called me to no purpose; she is sinking fast. There is nothing to be done except to submit."

"Her extremities have been cold these two hours," interposed the nurse; "she is dead already."

"Make strong mustard poultices, and apply them to her feet," he said sternly, and looking at the last speaker. "But it's no use," he added,

in a softer tone ; “ the spark of life is going out rapidly—rapidly.”

Down upon his knees before the speaker fell the elder of the two gentlemen. He clasped his hands together, and looking up into the Doctor's face with an expression of intense agony, prayed him to save her. “ Save her, save her, Sumner ! don't let her die. I can't die with her. I dare not go where she is going ! Save her even yet—even yet ! ”

“ Man, am I God, that you appeal to me thus ? ” So saying, the Doctor turned aside from the speaker, not tenderly, but severely.

Meanwhile the poultices had been applied, and they produced a momentary effect. It seemed, indeed, as if the vital energies, loath to be subdued, would even yet rally ; for she again half opened her eyes, and her lips moved. They all stooped down to listen, but the words which came, came in broken accents.

“ It grows very dark. I hear a bell. Oh, my love—take care of my love—come nearer—nearer.” Then there came a long pause, the eyes closing

once more. Then they suddenly opened again—opened to their fullest stretch—and from them a light streamed out, so clear, so ecstatic, so unearthly, that not one of those who witnessed the spectacle that night ever afterwards forgot it.

“Angels! angels! I see them! They fill the room! I see it all! How glorious!”

It was the last effort of nature—the last struggle with the great enemy—the last attempt, let us rather say, of matter to crib and confine the immortal spirit. For who can doubt that the words then spoken described truly, though in outline, the dawn of glories which become visible to the righteous, and only to the righteous, when that which is immortal in them is passing from time into eternity? Be that as it may, the speaker never spoke again. Slowly and gradually her stare became fixed and lustreless. Heavier, and at longer intervals, the breathing came, and at last, with one deep convulsive sob, the spirit passed away. The unbroken silence of death fell upon the room like a dark shadow.

CHAPTER II.

“GRAVE, WHERE IS THY VICTORY?”

THE blow had fallen, and all who surrounded the bed, not excepting the nurse herself, appeared to be stunned by it. Its immediate effect upon each was peculiar, probably characteristic. Prone to the ground, as if stricken by a sledge-hammer, the elder of the two gentlemen fell. He grovelled on the floor, hiding his face in his hands. The younger bowed his head towards the dead, and was silent. The Doctor stepped back a pace, and uttered the words, as it seemed unconsciously, to himself, “What a tragedy!” Presently the younger of the two gentlemen spoke, addressing himself to the elder. There was a strange mixture in his tone of bitterness and commiseration, though the latter perhaps preponderated.

“Rise—rise ; no good can come of this now ; you have been too long here already. Remember that others must be thought of as well as yourself. Rise, and go home.”

The person addressed made no answer, neither did he change his position. Probably he did not hear. The Doctor, upon this, approached, and taking hold of his arm, lifted him up. The expression of his countenance was cadaverous, and his stare vacant and wild.

“You must rouse yourself and act ; this is no time for self-abandonment. Go ! We will remain and do all that’s necessary to-night. You can return to-morrow, if you like.”

The abject man obeyed abjectly. Without casting so much as another glance towards the bed, he allowed his coat and hat to be brought, and, putting them on mechanically, moved away and closed the room-door after him. The Doctor, turning towards the window, drew back the curtain. The grew dawn of a winter’s morning was coming in, and he saw in its light the figure of the departing man cross the little lawn. He saw the gate in the wall open, the figure pass through, the

gate close again, and the figure disappear. He continued, however, to look through the window still, as if to withdraw himself from the scene which might be passing behind him. It was an act of exceeding delicacy on his part, yet the friend from whom he diverted his eyes scarcely recognised the fact. It is certain that it exercised no influence whatever over his proceedings, for he still stood where he had been standing when the last act in the tragedy was played out, and continued to gaze, as he had gazed then, upon the countenance beautiful in death. Presently he stooped down and kissed the cold brow, and then, without uttering a single syllable, turned, and withdrew towards the fireplace. The Doctor heard him move, and turned also, and they sat down in front of the fire together. By-and-by the feeble cry of an infant was heard, and the nurse quitted the room. Their tongues, on this, appeared to be loosened.

“What’s to be done with the child?” asked the Doctor.

“Done with it ; what should be done with it ?

I will take it home with me, and give it my name, and rear it with the rest of my children, and give it all a father's love. Oh, Doctor, she was so good, so pure, so gifted, so beautiful! I worshipped the very ground on which she trod; and so would you have done had you known her as I knew her. God forgive me! I am tempted at this moment to believe that there is no Providence watching over us or shaping out our destinies. Do with her child! Do you think that I could ever consent to intrust a charge so precious to strangers?"

"I am the last man in the world, as you know, to put prudence in the scale against moral right; but you ought well to weigh this matter before you act. Bear in mind that your position is more than commonly delicate. Don't forget that there are interests at stake far higher than concern you as an individual. You are not called upon to imperil these, even in such a cause as this."

"And leave the innocent child to be brought up, I don't know by whom! and cast aside, I

don't know how, whenever caprice or some worse impulse shall dictate! No, my friend; I will run all risks rather than lade my soul with a burden like that."

"I can't blame you for so feeling. It is generous, noble, perhaps right; but I confess that I look forward with some misgivings to the possible consequences."

"Be these what they may, my mind is made up. Is it not my duty to render to her dead all the reparation that I can for the evils which she suffered living? For you know as well as I that if I don't, nobody else will."

"Perhaps; but what will others say?"

"Make your mind easy on that head. There is nothing to fear in that direction. I have kept no secrets from her heretofore, and I can trust her fully with this also. Thanks for turning my thoughts into their proper channel. Now, will you help me, while we have the house to ourselves, to look over her papers? For many reasons it is desirable that nothing should be preserved that might create even suspicion."

The Doctor assenting, they applied themselves to ransack the wardrobe, in which, as was to be expected, they found one drawer filled with papers. Only a few of these were inscribed with the English character ; but all were arranged and tied together in little bundles, with the utmost regard to order and neatness. Bundle after bundle of letters was unrolled, and the letters themselves opened, glanced at, and committed to the flames. It seemed, too, as if this latter operation were carried on, not only without reluctance, but with fierceness. Not one was read at length, few were even cursorily scanned over. The handwriting alone marked each as it came to the top as fit only to be burnt, and it was cast into the flames ruthlessly. At last a sealed packet, with a superscription in French, was found. It fell into the Doctor's hands, who broke the seal, uttered an exclamation of horror, and handed it to his friend. The other took and read it through calmly, resolutely, and with teeth clenched together.

"I was sure of it," he said, in a low constrained tone. "I was as confident of this as I could be

of anything of which there was no positive proof before me. That must not go into the flames with the rest ; but what to do with it, how to act in the case, what line to take, now or hereafter—I confess I don't see my way to a solution of these difficulties ; do you ?”

“None further than this, that the document must be carefully preserved. It refers to that which may affect your own fortunes, and the fortunes of your family too.”

“My fortunes ! no, no ; not mine nor theirs. Let that pass out of your mind for ever. But to her memory and to the future of her child it may be of the greatest consequence. We must take care of it. Will you keep it, or shall I ?”

“Better that neither of us keep it, unless you see your way to following up the search at once. It might get mislaid, or, in the event of a fire in either of our houses, burnt. If I were you I should deposit it with my banker, making a memorandum in duplicate, of which I can keep one copy and you the other.”

The suggestion was promptly acted upon. A

memorandum of what had been found, and how it was to be disposed of, was at once drawn up in duplicate by the Doctor to which both of the gentlemen attached their signatures, each putting his own copy afterwards into his pocket. The packet was next restored to its original cover and another placed over it, which was sealed with two seals, bearing the crests of the two signatories, and inscribed as deeds of importance usually are. And then the further search of the wardrobe went forward, but with far less eagerness.

So passed an hour and a half, during which the dawn enlarged itself into day, bringing out into painful distinctness the squalor which, even in the best-appointed chambers, waits upon the footsteps of death. The unswept hearth, the displaced furniture—the medicine-bottles, some empty and some half filled, which crowded the chimney-piece—the washstand, the night-table—the bed with its appointments rumpled and tossed about—the cold, still, wax-like countenance turned up from the pillow,—all these looked ghastly and terrible in the full blaze of a clear, calm, sun-

shiny winter's morning. The two friends became sensible of the humiliating influence which, even when our tenderest affections are concerned, such objects exercise upon us, and having ended their task, they rose simultaneously and withdrew into another apartment. It was a little drawing-room, furnished with admirable taste, and looking out upon the garden, one small flight of steps beneath the chamber where they had passed the night—and there in silence and melancholy they breakfasted together.

Meanwhile directions were given, and all things necessary done, to prepare the body for its last resting-place. The nurse also was directed to bring in the child, which slept calmly and sweetly while these two men kissed its little forehead, one of them weeping bitterly while he did so. Then, after locking the drawers in the bedroom, and making the key safe, they walked out together in order to deposit their precious burden at the Bank in St James's, and to give the necessary orders for the funeral. They finally parted in Green Street—the Doctor that

he might get himself ready to visit his many patients—his friend returning to spend the day in the villa where he had spent so miserable a night.

We need not linger over this portion of our history. The gentleman whose fortunes we have thus far followed spent the day alone—so he did the day following, and the day after that. His companion at the death-scene returned no more ; no, not even when the hearse and a solitary mourning-coach drew up in the road to receive their respective burdens. He and the Doctor were the only mourners who saw the coffin borne out of the chamber, down the steps, across the lawn still covered with snow, and deposited in the hearse. They took their seats together in the mourning-coach, and the little cavalcade went on its way. A churchyard in the vicinity of London, yet far enough removed to retain a good deal of that air of simple gravity which gives to our village cemeteries their peculiar charm, was the point to which they were driven. The clergyman met them in his surplice at the gate, and walked before, repeating,

as he went, the well-known sentences, "I am the Resurrection and the Life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." The psalm and the lesson were read in the body of the church, and by-and-by the undertaker's men lifted the coffin again, and bore it to the open grave. What a moment is that! when, the pall being withdrawn, the cords are heard to rattle through the rings, and, swaying to and fro, the coffin is lowered, slowly, carefully, down into the abyss.

"Hold up, my poor fellow, hold up," the Doctor whispered to his friend, as the latter, advancing to the very edge of the grave, raised his hands above his head and clasped them together. Vain words, had they not been promptly followed by the unlocking of those clasped hands, and the bringing of one firmly yet kindly under the arm of the speaker. For the brain of the mourner swam round, so that, supported upon the shoulder of his friend, it cannot be said that he heard or saw, except as

in a dream, how "earth was committed to earth, dust to dust, and ashes to ashes."

They turned away at the close of the service, both of them sad, one stupefied. No conversation passed between them as they drove back at a rapid pace to the place whence they had set out; and when they entered the villa itself they did so mechanically, for the sense of desolation which came over both as they traversed the little hall, passing thence into the drawing-room, seemed to have stifled in them every other consciousness.

"It is over now," the Doctor at length said, "and you have a great duty to perform; rouse yourself and face it."

"True, true," was the answer; and then it was arranged between them that the Doctor, after settling for arrears of rent, and giving to the landlady and her daughter a few articles of wearing apparel—rather as memorials of a lodger to whom they had been very much attached, than because the present was intrinsically valuable—should remove the effects of the deceased to his

own house, and keep them there till otherwise advised. This settled, there remained only one thing more to be done. A post-chaise was already at the gate, from which a respectably-dressed young woman descended. She helped to convey to the carriage a box, as well as a plain leather portmanteau, after which she entered the drawing-room and curtsied to the gentlemen.

"You will return in the chaise, Maria," observed the Doctor, "and mind that you are very careful by the way that the child catch no cold."

The woman was in the act of replying when the landlady, bathed in tears, entered with an infant in her arms.

"God bless you, my dear dear friend!"

"God bless you, my noble fellow!"

So spake these men, clasping their hands together, and falling on each other's necks.

One stayed behind to fulfil the promise which he had given. The other, followed by the woman and the child, entered the chaise. It drove off.

CHAPTER III.

DOMESTICS.

ABOUT half an hour or forty minutes' drive from what was formerly called the end of the Oxford Road, stood, seventy years ago, one of those stately mansions which the traveller sees in no other country in Europe except in England alone. The frequent relief in its architecture, of red brick-work with stone mouldings—the tall chimneys, with the many gabled ends and oriel windows—marked the date of its original structure as that of the later Tudors. A park, enclosed with high brick walls, and measuring, perhaps, twenty or thirty acres in surface extent, surrounded it on every side, wherein grew and flourished singly, in clumps, and in groves, elms,

oaks, and horse-chestnuts, with here and there a yew-tree intermingled among them. You approached the place through richly-ornamented iron gates, having lodges on each side of them, along a winding avenue, overshadowed on either side by limes, the perfume from which, in summer, loaded the air, just as the air itself was made musical by the ceaseless hum of the bees that clustered over them. Six or eight noble ilexes grew along the whole front of the mansion, skirting the grass, and flinging a shadow over the gravel road beyond. The main entrance to the house itself was through a porch, to which you ascended by a flight of stone steps; and beyond the porch lay the hall, that never-failing and most architecturally beautiful feature in every edifice of the sort. Of the terraced gardens which stretched out beneath the drawing-room windows, you saw, from this side, nothing. They were concealed by the breadth of the building; but upon them, as upon everything else in and about the mansion, all that taste could devise, and a lavish expenditure of money command, was provided in abundance.

Belmore House, for so the place was called, had been owned since the reign of the second Charles by a family the first ennobled member of which contrived to make himself rich, as courtiers in those days not unfrequently did, by gross jobbing. He held office under both of the last princes of the house of Stuart, managed to retain it after William and Mary came to the throne, and when the Whig cabal brought in George I., and ruled in his name, to them also he continued to be the most obsequious of servants. His descendant, the present owner of the title and fortune thus acquired, resembled him in almost nothing except personal appearance. The Lord Belmore with whom we have to deal possessed no genius whatever for accumulating; neither was he gifted with that convenient pliability of manner and opinion which enabled his ancestor to be all things to all men, and to advance in so doing the interests of himself and his family, at least as much as he advanced the interests of the country. The present Lord Belmore, on the contrary, though understood to be

clever and well informed, professed absolute indifference to most things except pleasure. In politics he called himself a Whig, voting, either in person or by proxy, as the leaders of the then opposition desired. But his appearances in the House of Lords were like angels' visits, "few and far between;" and when there he could seldom be prevailed upon to take any prominent part in public business. For this his party blamed him, because it was universally believed that the will and not the power to lead in affairs of state was wanting to him. His lordship, however, indifferent to that judgment, held his own course, and reaped his reward, which was this: Belmore House became under his auspices, and the auspices of the lady who shared his title and his bed, the resort of all the wits and men of genius about town. Dine there when you might, you never failed to meet at his lordship's table the foremost among the poets, the painters, the critics, the actors, of the day. No doubt the admixture of the fair sex in these brilliant gatherings was always rare, sometimes non-existent.

But for this there was a reason. Some dozen years or thereabouts prior to the date at which our history commences, Lord Belmore had thought fit to run away with his neighbour's wife, to whom, after a divorce had, by the slow process of Act of Parliament, been obtained, he became *foro ecclesiæ* united. Now the world had long ago, just as it has now, its own mode of dealing with such breaches of decorum. It was not then, any more than it is at present, an inquisitorial world. Being indeed the very reverse of extreme to mark what was done amiss, it shut its eyes as long as it conveniently could, provided only that which it assumed to be done were done discreetly. But if the paramour married and gave his name and his rank (assuming him to have any rank) to a *divorcée*, that was an outrage on all proprieties, which fared infinitely worse at the hands of society, when George III. reigned and Queen Charlotte held her Court, than it fares now. Hence my Lady Belmore, when, after a year's entire seclusion, she arrived a bride at the stately mansion of her new lord, found that few

among those of her own sex with whom she used to associate under another name, were willing to renew the acquaintanceship. Lady Belmore felt this ostracism as keenly as women so circumstanced usually do. It gnawed at her very heart-strings ; yet she was proud as well as sensitive, and sooner than let her sufferings become known out of doors, she would have died upon her own threshold. Her line of action was therefore clearly marked out, and she entered upon it defiantly. Women never had been fit companions for her. She worshipped intellect, of which a very small share indeed was by nature assigned to the sex, and she sought and found more than compensation for what she had lost among women in the society of men. Here and there, to be sure, in the circles into which she had been born, a strong-minded individual would be found, who put more value upon what it was in her ladyship's power to offer than upon the idle gossip of other women. To these she threw open her doors, and they were too magnanimous not to enter in. But she had others of

her own sex besides these to support her ; intellectual ladies, the wives of men of science, of men who had raised themselves to distinction in the arts—authors' wives, though they more rarely came up to the proper mark ; authoresses—eminent actresses, and here and there a singer. With the kind aid of these, and such as these, my lady contrived from time to time to interlace, pleasantly enough, silken robes and stomachers sparkling with diamonds among the black and blue coats of poets and witty divines. The grand result was, that, despite the demirep atmosphere that encircled them, the parties at Belmore House were acknowledged to be the most charming in or near London ; and that the highest social ambition of young statesmen, young artists, and young barristers, was to be allowed the privilege of sharing in them, and of talking about them afterwards. Let us not pass on to other matters without a single word descriptive of the lady herself. She was a woman of queenly beauty, one of Reubens's beauties, — tall, well proportioned, fleshy, full. Her lofty brow, and keen,

penetrating, light-blue eye, bespoke a temper imperious, but not beyond the reach of control, with a will that would brook no opposition, let it come from what quarter it might. Her voice was not unmusical, though its pitch was somewhat high. No one, however, could hear her speak without perceiving that she had all her life long been accustomed to command, and that the most hopeless thing in the world would be to gainsay or try to convince her that she was wrong, provided the matter in dispute involved, in the most remote degree, either her own pleasure or her own convenience.

It was a cold winter's morning. The clock was striking the half-hour after ten, when Lady Belmore, followed by two well-grown boys apparently of the respective ages of twelve and eight, entered the breakfast-room. A bright fire blazed in the grate, and beside the well-spread table a couple of servants, both of them out of livery, waited. Two covers only were laid, two chairs set, one of which, however, remained empty, while my lady took her place, with her back to the fire, on the seat

which was respectfully moved, first in one direction, and then in another, to receive her. The boys, whose morning meal had been eaten elsewhere, and at an earlier hour, idled over some books on the hearth-rug, as boys are apt to do if they be either educated at home or happen to be at home for the holidays. Their mother addressed herself in silence to her roll and coffee. She ate little, took no notice whatever of her sons, and was evidently out of humour. By-and-by the door opened again, and Lord Belmore entered. No sign of recognition passed between the husband and the wife, as the former placed himself on the vacant chair, with his back to the window; and the servants, after attending to his lordship's immediate wants, and placing within reach all that it was probable he would subsequently require, quitted the room.

"Why don't you make the most of this fine morning, boys?" said the lady, turning abruptly to her sons; "it will do you more good to skate now than later, and I shall want you to go out with me by-and-by"

"You forget, my love," interposed his lordship, "that M. de Couvré comes to-day; the boys are very well employed preparing for him—let them be."

"The boys will do as I wish," replied my lady; "M. de Couvré's time is our time, not his own—he can come to-morrow or next day. Go and skate, I tell you."

There needed no repetition of an order so agreeable. The two lads flung their books aside, and without taking the slightest notice of their father, rushed out of the room. Their departure, however agreeable it might be to one of the couple thus left *tête-à-tête*, was evidently not desired by the other. My lord seated himself upright in his chair, and was beginning a lecture on the evil done to children by over-indulgence, when his better half cut him short.

"All that will cure itself if the boys, as they grow up, follow the example of their accomplished father. You were late last night, my lord—or early, rather; I should say, early this morning."

"I was detained longer than I expected at the

House ; we had a protracted and interesting debate. I hope my coming in at such an unseasonable hour did not disturb you."

"Oh, not at all ; I happened to be awake, and heard you by the merest accident, though you stepped very softly, I must admit, along the corridor."

"I'm glad I did not disturb you," he replied ; "but with respect to these boys——"

"Disturb me ! why, my lord, it was broad daylight ; I was seriously thinking of getting up."

"Was it indeed ? so it was. We had a long debate. We did not get away till two in the morning, and then Lord Bridgewater and the Duke of Birmingham, and two or three more of us, adjourned to Brooks's, where we had supper, and played. I am sorry to say I came away loser by five hundred pounds."

"You shouldn't play for such high stakes ; you can't stand the excitement. I never saw you look so haggard as you did when you passed my door, and one hour in bed can have hardly refreshed you. It is curious," she continued, glancing her

eye over the 'Morning Chronicle' which lay upon the table, "but I don't see any report of your debate."

"Well, that is curious, rather," he replied; "but the truth is, that, as nobody expected a debate to come on with us, the reporters were probably all employed in the other House. This sometimes happens, but not often."

"It happened also, on the present occasion, that you forgot your engagement at home. We got through the evening pretty well considering; but you were missed, and the dinner was spoilt. You might have let us know that public business detained you."

"What! didn't my messenger arrive in time?"

"No, he never arrived at all. Was he sent? My lord, I don't believe that there was any debate in the House of Lords last night. I don't believe that you supped at Brooks's, or lost money at cards, or did anything half so rational. I don't believe——"

She was going on, her firm voice growing, as each sentence rounded itself off, more firm, when

the door opened, and a servant entered to announce that M. de Couvré was in waiting. She looked round, and was about to desire that M. de Couvré should return to-morrow, when Lord Belmore rose.

"No, no ; that won't do. I had better see him myself, and explain. We must not forget that he has feelings as well as ourselves, or that his condition as an *émigré* gentleman gives him some claim on our delicacy. I will tell him that you had made an engagement for the boys, forgetting that this was his day, and make your apology."

"Make whatever apology you please," she replied, maintaining an air of perfect composure, till the door closed on both her lord and the servant, and then the storm broke. She sprang from her seat, flung her arms wildly about, paced the room to and fro with a hurried step, and ended by throwing herself into an arm-chair.

"What is the use of struggling against destiny !" she cried aloud, rocking herself to and fro. "He never really cared for me. I feared it and

suspected it long ago : I know it now ! And yet I gave him all that woman can give ! — good name, social position, a heart that neither loves nor hates by measure, self-respect — ay, self-respect — for that is lost ! lost ! lost ! though neither he nor they take in the truth. And what for ? To be treated like a child's plaything, cared for so long as the toy is new, and then cast aside ! Oh, fool that I was, and headstrong ! Fool that I am now ! Can I better myself ? Can I bring him back again ? O Frank, Frank !” she continued, gradually softening in her manner till tears filled her eyes and rolled down her cheeks, “ be to me again what I once believed you to be, or make me believe it still as I believed it then ! Don't forsake me quite ! don't make me feel, more than I do, what a degraded thing I am ! This is downright folly,” she went on, after a pause of bitter weeping ; “ the dream is broken, the vision's fled ! I must make the most of what is left. Pooh ! that fit is over.”

And over the fit was. She rose, quitted the

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breakfast-room, bathed her swollen eyes in warm water, and sat down in her boudoir to write letters, as calm and collected as if no such paroxysm had occurred. The carriage was ordered at the usual hour, and, as usual, she went out shopping.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ÉMIGRÉ.

“ I AM extremely sorry, M. de Couvré,” said Lord Belmore, as he entered the hall, “ that you should have had this long, cold walk for nothing. Lady Belmore forgot to send you word that your pupils would be particularly engaged to-day ; but, if you can make it convenient to come again to-morrow, Mr Thompson will give up an hour or two of his time in your favour, and you can have them then. Won’t you take some refreshment after your walk—a glass of wine, or a cup of coffee ?”

The individual thus addressed had reached, or was, perhaps, a little beyond, the middle of life ; he was tall, and very thin. His well-powdered

hair, gathered into a queue behind, hung over the collar of a coat which had seen its best days, but was still scrupulously neat and clean. In the long broad skirts were outside pockets with lapels, and the skirts themselves reached down to the calf of the leg, or rather below it. An old embroidered waistcoat, from the breast of which a pile of the finest cambric protruded, came low upon a pair of fawn-coloured breeches, which, with the white cotton stockings, shoes, and a pair of fawn-coloured gaiters, reaching barely above the ankle, completed his costume. He stood in the centre of the hall, a silver-headed cane in one hand, and a small cocked hat in the other, the very impersonation of what in truth he was, a French gentleman of the old school. The apology offered for the waste of a day was accepted at once, though not, as it seemed, without an effort to hide the mortification caused by it; and, bowing low, he was about to take his departure, when Lord Belmore again pressed hospitality upon him.

“I know that you French gentlemen do not

make the solid breakfasts that we do ; pray come in and refresh yourself—it is getting on to mid-day.”

“Thank you, my lord,” said M. de Couvré, in broken English which we don’t propose to imitate, “I will not intrude on your hospitality—I will return to London and renew my search, though hope grows weaker and weaker day by day.”

“I’m extremely sorry for you, M. de Couvré. It’s a heavy burden to bear ; I wish that I could lighten it for you ; but, as I told you long ago, I’m quite as much at fault as yourself, and have no influence whatever with the Government. Come in, pray, and rest, if you won’t eat.”

“No, my lord, when I came here I came to teach your sons and to earn my wages ; I can’t stay to do nothing. It’s wonderful to me that a great English nobleman like yourself should have no power to move the police. Whatever I had desired the *sergeants-de-ville* to do they would have done for me in Lyons, twenty years ago, without questioning. But I am an exile now, and friendless. God help me !”

Lord Belmore either was, or appeared to be, touched by the grief of the poor exile, but he could do nothing more than repeat the expression of his regret that it was beyond his power to apply to it a remedy. The two therefore parted, the one going back to his library, where he shut himself up, the other traversing the avenue with head no longer erect, and passing out of it away towards the great city. We will leave Lord Belmore to his studies, whatever these may be, and follow the poor exile to his home.

M. de Couvré put some restraint upon himself as long as his course lay within eyeshot of the windows of Belmore House. As soon as he knew, as it were by instinct, that a bend in the avenue concealed him, nature had her way. His head dropped, and he reached the lodge a broken-down man. He had a long journey before him—a long journey, that is to say, for one who lived, as exiles are often constrained to do, as a vast majority of the nobles and priests whom the hurricane of the French Revolution had swept from their own homes, were reduced at the end of the last and

the beginning of the present century, to live here and elsewhere. And besides that his frame was the reverse of robust, a great grief sat upon him. He toiled on, however, resting from time to time upon a stone, or on the frozen bank of the wayside, without making any reply to the invitations which one after another the drivers of short stages gave him, to mount and go with them. By-and-by Tyburn turnpike came in sight, and, as if remembering that once beyond that point no further opportunity of resting would be afforded him, the old man, for old he was in constitution if not in years, seated himself on a milestone. He was now within the outer wave of that living flood which is constantly pouring in two different directions in and out of London. Private carriages, stages, waggons, people on foot and on horseback, passed him by, without so much as a glance of curiosity, far less of recognition. He was as much alone in that throng as if he had found a seat in the Sahara desert. He was as little conscious that crowds were moving to and fro as if his solitude had been that of the vast ocean.

Presently a coach, richly emblazoned on the pannels with a coronet surmounting the shield, and two powdered footmen standing on the foot-board behind, drew near, and a boy, thrusting his head from the window, called the Frenchman by his name. M. de Couvré looked up, recognised the younger of Lord Belmore's sons, and, observing that the horses were checked, rose and moved towards the carriage. He had not, however, advanced two paces, lifting his hat at the same time, when the reins were slackened and the fiery steeds plunged onwards. The equipage was soon far in advance of the milestone, and the old man, shrugging his shoulders, replaced his hat upon his head and walked on.

He walked now more erect and firmly all through the length of what is now called Oxford Street, and down by Wardour Street towards St Ann's, Soho. In front of a respectable house, not very far from the church, he stopped. It was there that he lodged, and the door being opened by a maid-servant, he took off his hat to her, made a bow, and walked up - stairs. His

apartment was on the third storey. It consisted of a single room, indifferently furnished, with a bed curtained off in a recess ; and at this moment both room and recess were in a state of great confusion. Fire in the grate there was none ; the hearth had not been swept, nor the remains of his breakfast removed ; they stood upon the uncovered table—a small, brown, crockery-ware coffee-pot, and a single cup, with a few crumbs of stale bread scattered upon a plate. The windows had not been opened, and the atmosphere, besides being close, was laden with fine dust. M. de Couvré shrank a little as he looked round upon the scene, and made a move towards the bell-rope, but he let the faded ribbon fall without ringing. “I am poor, and an exile,” he said to himself ; “probably they did not expect me back so soon. God help me ! God help me !”

His eye turned as he uttered this expression towards a large box or trunk which stood in a corner of the room, close to the fireplace. It was evidently not of English make, for the roof was arched, and several rows of large-headed

brass nails ran longitudinally over the black leather with which it was covered. The hasps which kept it close were brass also. He approached, and applying to each of the locks, of which there were three, a curiously-shaped key, he raised, not the lid, but one half of the box itself; letting that portion drop upon the floor, he reverentially lifted from the other, one fold of a rich silk shawl, and took from beneath it a morocco case. This he opened, holding it in both hands so that the light might fall strong upon it from the window. It contained a miniature of the largest size, exquisitely painted, and set in a gilt frame. The subject was a girl just budding into womanhood; a face radiant with the beauty which comes less of feature than of expression; the daughter, manifestly, of a climate sunnier than our own, over whose clear brown cheek the flush of health mantled like the bloom upon the apple-blossom, the most delicately tinted flower of nature's painting. How noble was that brow! how luxuriant the dark tresses that surrounded it! parting in soft braids on either

side of the forehead, and falling over the swan-like neck in glossy curls. What depth of soul was in those lustrous eyes as they looked out upon you from beneath the long dark lashes that fringed them! How all but perfect the outline of that countenance—Grecian except in this, that the upper lip, somewhat prolonged, gave to the mouth an expression of firmness, which, but for that defect, would have been wanting! The old man, kneeling down, pressed his lips to the glass, closed the case, and placed it inside his coat, next to his heart. He then thrust his hand a second time into the box, and drew out a purse. It contained a few gold coins—not more than five or six—all of which except one he transferred to his waistcoat-pocket, but not the purse itself—that he put back again, with great care, into the trunk, and then replacing the fold of the shawl, he pulled the upper portion of the box over the lower, and made both as secure against either plunder or curiosity as the three locks and their brazen hasps could make them.

He had risen from his knees after doing all

this, and was taking down from a peg in the wall a velvet-mounted cloak, which, though threadbare, was in other respects such as gentlemen of that day were accustomed to wear, when his landlady, after knocking at the door and waiting till the signal was answered, entered the room. She came to apologise for the state in which he had found his apartment, the blame of which she threw, as a matter of course, upon her maid. The fact was, that good servants were not now to be had. She didn't know what the world would come to ; but, for her part, she would rather do all the work herself, if she could only find time for it, than be dependent on any one of them. All this, though volubly uttered, was uttered in a tone, not only not rude or unmannerly, but respectful in the extreme ; for Mrs Todd was one of those women who pride themselves on being able to distinguish between real gentlefolks and pretenders to gentility. Mr Discover, as she persisted in calling her lodger, had been under her roof for nearly a year. "It was no fault of his, poor gentleman, if the world behaved ill to him. He had paid his rent

punctually from first to last, and gave as little trouble as gentlemen could give ; and though obliged of late to give up her first floor, and to betake himself to one of the cheapest and shabbiest apartments in the place, she was not going on that account to have him treated with disrespect." And in order to convince him of this, she let her tongue run loose in disparagement of Betsy's shameful want of method, for which she would have certainly been dismissed on the instant, but that Mrs Todd did not know where to look for a successor. M. de Couvré listened for some time in silence, and then suggested that perhaps after all Betsy was not so much to blame ; he had come home sooner than his wont ; had he only delayed his return an hour or two, he apartment would have been, he had no doubt, in excellent order.

"Oh, that's just like you, Mounseer ; you're allays a-making excuses for servants, allays taking other people's part that don't deserve it. But deary me, deary me, you're not going out again

this bitter cold day on an empty stomach. What's a cup of coffee without sugar or milk, and such a crumb of dry bread as you eat with it! I'll dress you a chop myself, or a steak, in no time, and you can sit in the parlour till your own fire is lighted. Now, Mounseer, do for once be reasonable—that's a dear good gentleman."

"Thank you, Mrs Todd, you are very good, but I have no appetite. I do not care to eat, and must not stay indoors, doing nothing, with so very much before me to do. You forget that my lost one is still absent, and that the voice within me says continually, Go out and search for her—go out and search for her."

"God help you, poor gentleman! how long is this to go on? Don't you yet begin to see that it's all labour lost? She'll turn up some day, that you may depend upon; but it will be when them that has took her away get tired of their prize, and she's glad to come back to her best friend. It's no use you're going out to seek her. You'll never find her."

"Nay, do not say so, good Mrs Todd ; the *chasseur*, the runner, what do you call him ? assures me, that he is on the right scent at last, and that a little more money wisely laid out will find her."

"Did ever woman hear the like ? There's no greater rogues unhung than them runners. They're only robbing you, Mounseer ; they'll do nothing for you—they don't intend."

"But my countrymen tell me that if I can only see the justice, the magistrate himself, he will put everything to rights. I am going now to beg an interview with him."

"Poor gentleman, poor gentleman !" exclaimed the honest woman, as M. de Couvré passed her by with his usual courteous bow, "it's no use arguing with him—he's clean out of his mind on that subject, and will be clean out of the body too, ere long, if he goes on. Well, we'll get his place made tidy a bit anyhow, and he shall have a hot supper waiting for him when he comes back, whether I be paid for it or no. Betsy !

Betsy, I say, come up here, you lazy wretch, and sweep out the gentleman's room, and get his windows cleaned a bit inside, and lay the fire. If I ever find you neglect him again in this way, you shall hear of it—do you mind what I say ? ”

CHAPTER V.

“THE PLAY’S THE THING.”

LADY BELMORE completed her shopping, left cards at the few doors that were open to receive them, and returned home at an hour rather earlier than usual. She had made an engagement for Lord Belmore and herself to be present that night at Drury Lane, and to sup, after the play was over, with a select party at Evans’s in Covent Garden market. This would necessitate a comparatively early dinner, and she hurried back under the apprehension that her lord might have forgotten the circumstance and gone out. It was a relief to her to find that he was at home. He was still in the library, from which, indeed, he had never stirred since he betook himself to it after break-

fast; and though the evening was beginning to close in, and the lamps in the hall were already lighted, he still sat in his seclusion without ringing for candles. Now Lady Belmore, though arrogant, irritable, and impatient of contradiction, was at bottom a true woman. She might be angry with her lord, with herself, with all the world; yet her lord was still to her what he had ever been, the one idol before which her proud heart bowed itself down. She had spoken harshly to him in the morning, and remained as much convinced as ever that there was ample cause for the feeling which prompted her to do so. But it was a thing so unusual with him to remain indoors a whole day, and, above all, to shut himself up as he seemed to have done in one room, that, in spite of the determination with which she had come back to let him know that she would not be neglected and take it patiently, anxiety on his account got the better of every other consideration, and she walked straight, after delivering the boys to their tutor, towards the library. She tried the door, but it was fastened

on the inside. She knocked, at first softly, then violently, and experienced an amount of relief, not to be expressed, when the demand was made in his voice, "Who's there?"

"It's I, Frank—let me in—I want to speak to you. I'm afraid you're ill. Open, I beg of you, and let me come in." There was a brief pause, then a movement across the room, then the bolt was withdrawn, and the door yielded to her pressure. She sprang in, and closing it behind her, threw herself at once upon Lord Belmore's neck.

"What is it, Frank? Tell me. I know that I have been harsh to you of late, and that I said this morning what it ill became me to say, all things considered. But you will forgive me, I know, and let me share your anxieties, whatever they may be. Are you ill in mind, or in body, or in both? Why do you try me by doubting my willingness to take my part in any evil that may come, to bear anything except the loss of your affection."

"I don't doubt you, Augusta. I'm quite sure that you are willing to suffer even more than you

have already done for my sake ; but, indeed, there's nothing to tell now. I'm out of sorts, as you see, that's all. Things have happened of late to disturb me, as they may disturb us all by-and-by. It would do me no good, it would give you needless pain, if I were to involve you in them prematurely."

"Then I don't share your confidence any longer," she exclaimed, falling back from him and standing erect. "Another perhaps has taken my place, and my presence wearies you. We have not seen too much of each other certainly, except in public, for these many months past. Is it your desire that we should see still less?"

"Augusta," replied Lord Belmore, speaking slowly, and as she could not fail to observe, solemnly, "make your mind easy on that head. No living woman comes between you and me—no living woman ever will. If that suspicion lies at the root of your uneasiness, dismiss it at once and for ever."

"May I believe you, Frank? May I accept your words as serious words—as God's truth?"

Oh! you don't know the relief they give to a spirit that has chafed and fretted of late over one dark idea, till all others seemed to have lost their power of appealing to it! Tell me this again, and then I will know that it is true."

"My poor Augusta," replied her husband, "if it be any comfort to you to hear them, I will repeat these words every day, for they are true words."

"What do I care, then, for anything in the world besides! Did I not choose you in preference to all that other women hold to be dearest? My home, when you sought it out, might not be a very bright one, but I made myself contented with it. I had wealth, station, friends—friends among my own sex, too, in abundance, such as they were—and perfect freedom to do as I liked and live with whom I pleased. All these I gave up for you—all these I would give up again a hundred times over, were it in my power to choose once more. Only let me keep your love, and I am more than repaid; I am rich indeed."

"Well, well, I did you great wrong, that I

know—but we can't recall the past; we must make the most of the present, and of the future too, so long as fate will allow."

"You don't repent the past, do you? I don't. So long as I am with you, and know that your happiness is in my keeping, what is there for me to care for besides? But you are ill."

"Not quite well, certainly, but I shall be better by-and-by. You are home early to-day."

"Yes, but you know we have an engagement this evening, and the dinner is ordered punctually at four."

"An engagement! I had forgotten that. Is it quite necessary that we should keep it? Couldn't you send an excuse?"

"There's no time for that now, but if you are too unwell to go out, we will stay at home, and make the best excuse we can to-morrow. I shall regret it, though."

"No, no, I'm not ill enough for that. I would not give you a moment's pain that could be avoided, only to spare myself. If we dine at four, it's time we were dressing."

His voice was soft and tender as he spoke, yet, strange to say, he made no movement to accept the caress with which she seemed anxious to reward this prompt compliance with her wishes. On the contrary, he stepped back a pace or two, and pretended to look for something on the table behind him. She was too sharp-witted not to notice that the movement was a voluntary one, and her pride took fire. She turned round, quitted the library, and when they met again, as they soon afterwards did, in the drawing-room, wore the same air of cold indifference which she had worn in the morning. The dinner passed with scarcely an exchange of words between them ; and when, by-and-by, the carriage was announced, husband and wife entered it silently.

Of all the minor trials to which human nature can be subjected, of all the lesser sufferings to which flesh is heir, there are few more difficult to go through with and sustain than to be compelled, when your spirits are exhausted, and your whole nature out of tune, to bear yourself as if you and care were utter strangers. Both Lord

and Lady Belmore arrived at the entrance of Drury Lane Theatre troubled and anxious. They carried their anxiety with them, up the stone steps along the corridor, and round into her ladyship's box, where a party of three gentlemen and a lady had arrived before them. These seemed to be in the highest possible spirits, and their greetings to the new-comers were hearty and joyous. My lady made a strong effort and caught the infection ; her lord struggled also, but not so successfully. He was rallied, of course, on his troubled aspect, and charged with having the cares of the nation on his back, "which I hold to be a burden especially inappropriate to-night," continued his fair antagonist, "when we have the merits of this wondrous debutante to judge of. You have not seen the O'Farrel yet, my lord, I think. Have you?"

"No," replied Lord Belmore, "somehow the drama has been out of favour with me of late. I have not had the opportunity of seeing her, but they tell me she is an astonishing creature."

"Astonishing! I should think so," observed

one of the gentlemen, a small neat man with a considerable brogue, and an eye bright as the morning star. "If she can't come up to Siddons in the dignity of the Roman matron, she goes infinitely beyond her in pathos and true feeling. I wish we had had 'Venice Preserved' to-night—there, she is in her glory; it is not acting, it is the thing itself."

"I don't agree with you, Tom," interposed, in a strong Scotch accent, another gentleman, like the first speaker, of slender build, but with an expressive, almost handsome countenance; "there never was, nor ever will be, an actress like Siddons. She is as great in Juliet as in Lady Macbeth; and for pathos and true feeling I defy you to pick out a character in the whole range of the English drama that will compare with that of Juliet."

"Well, gentlemen," observed the third male occupant of the box, whose aspect bore a strong resemblance to that of a corpse which had been buried and dug up again, "we'll soon have an op-

portunity of judging who's right and who's wrong. For my part I consider 'Venice Preserved' to be one of the most absurd of the many absurd pieces that retain their hold upon the English stage, and the character of Belvidera to be exactly that which no woman of genius would condescend to play. But Juliet tries the mettle of the best, and we shall see presently whether the new favourite can make us forget the old. I hold myself quite impartial in the matter."

"Hush!" exclaimed Lady Belmore, "the call-bell is ringing, and as I really am a lover of the drama, I beg that you will keep silence till the drop-scene falls."

The order was obeyed. The speakers held their peace when the curtain rose, and spoke no more during the progress of the act. They held their peace, however, more as critics watching for defects than as men enthralled by any deep sense of the beautiful. The pageant was grand, and every character that came and went across the stage was well sustained. No wonder. It was an era of

marvellous histrionic power, when the Kembles, Young, Murray, Abbot, were in their prime, and their influence made itself felt by all who came in contact with them. And to this, not unnaturally, the occupants of Lady Belmore's box attributed no small measure of the satisfaction which they derived from the first appearance of the new Juliet. They reserved their discussion, therefore, when the drop-scene fell, arriving only at this result—that all that dress and a graceful form and manner could do for her was done for the object of their very guarded panegyric. A widely-different effect was produced when the second act began. There was no occasion then to call for silence ; every lip was mute of its own accord, every eye fixed, every ear open to take in, one by one as they were uttered, the thrilling, moving sentences that gave, not the reflex, but the reality of love's young dream. There was no recurrence on this occasion, when the drop-scene fell, to critical discussion. With one consent sentence came forth, It is perfect ! And Lord Belmore, whose taste

the world of London acknowledged to be perfect, was appealed to to confirm the verdict. Why is he so pale? Why is it that he has no word to utter—no answer to make to the appeal which is addressed to him?

“Frank, you are ill again,” said Lady Belmore, rising and looking back towards him. “I was certain there was something very wrong before we set out: let us go home.”

“No, no,” replied Lord Belmore, making a great effort, “it is past now; I’m all right again. I can’t account for it; my circulation seemed to stop for a moment; it goes on again now. What a piece of acting! It is a reality, not a sham.”

“Didn’t I tell you so!” observed the gentleman who seemed to regard Miss O’Farrel as his peculiar *protégée*. “Didn’t I say that Siddons herself couldn’t come near her in the display of pathos! Why, she stopped his lordship’s pulses, and, egad! she went near to stopping mine too.”

“Spoken like a veritable Irishman,” replied he

of the Doric twang ; “ but I’m not going to contradict you ; it’s the finest thing that was ever seen on the London stage.”

Just as these words were uttered, Lord Belmore rose with a sort of start, and turned towards the box-door. It was evident to the whole party now that something serious was the matter. His movement was agitated and rapid, and his hand made more than one effort to grasp the handle of the door before it succeeded. All sprang to their feet, and Lady Belmore, rushing forward, seized his arm, just in time to prevent him from passing alone into the anteroom, possibly beyond it.

“ Don’t go out into the night air, Frank ! Remember we sent the carriage away. Sit down here beside the fire, and Malone or Grant will call a coach. We will go home at once ; we ought not to have come at all. The light and heat and the play are too much for you.”

“ I’m sorry to be so disagreeable,” said Lord Belmore, looking round on his guests with a ghastly smile, “ but I really can’t help it. Don’t

let me break up the party by any means. The heat and the excitement are rather more than I can bear, but I shall be better by-and-by. You stay the play out. I will go on to Evans's and try what a little quiet will do for me ; and if I don't feel better after a while I will go home. Pray return all of you to the box ; you will miss the very best part of the play."

"No, no," replied Lady Belmore ; "I at least can't return—I will go with you. Do you think the best acting in the world would interest me, knowing that you are ill?"

"Or any of us?" added her friends, with one consent ; "we will all go with you."

"Then I don't go at all," replied Lord Belmore ; "the disposition to faint will pass off, I daresay—indeed it is pretty well over already. You go back to the box, I will wait here till the play is over, and then we will adjourn in a body to Evans's."

He spoke with a firmer voice than before, and the pallor had left his cheek. His guests, therefore, after some hesitation, real or pretended, did

as he had desired, but Lady Belmore remained with her husband. Whatever the feelings might have been which were uppermost with her when they entered the house, her only thought now seemed to be how to nurse and sustain him. And she succeeded. At first he was restless, under the pressure, as it seemed, of great pain. He rose up, walked to and fro, sat down again, and paid little heed to the words of tenderness which she addressed to him, but by degrees his sufferings appeared to abate, and by-and-by he sat still and calm. His manner towards herself likewise became affectionate. He said kind and grateful things which brought tears into her eyes.

“ Oh yes, I’m all right now—what thunders of applause ! did you ever hear the like ? That girl will make her own fortune, and if I don’t deceive myself, set up a new standard of acting in this country.”

The play was over. The ladies and gentlemen who had sat it out came into the anteroom full of admiration. There had been no such in-

tellectual treat in their day ; they were determined to seek out and cultivate the personal acquaintance of such an enchantress. Of course they could not think of diluting the pleasure they had just received by mixing it with anything baser, and it was an immense satisfaction to them to find that the invalid was better. Therefore all were ready and willing to restrain their critical observations till they should find a more fitting opportunity of putting them forth over the supper-table. The carriages had been ordered to meet them at this hour, and to the carriages they would go.

In the times about which we are writing, private boxes were more frequent in our great theatres than they are now, and being hired for the most part by the season only, they had not, all of them, what private boxes usually have now, their own special means of ingress and egress. Lady Belmore's box was one of those which could be approached only by the common corridor ; and along that, and down the main flight of steps, our party proceeded. They walked in groups :

Lady Belmore attended by her three poets, his lordship escorting the popular authoress, who made up the sum of their party. As they descended the grand staircase, their eyes fell upon two persons—a man and a woman—who seemed to have planted themselves, for some purpose or another, close to one of the ticket-takers' boxes. There was nothing very peculiar about the appearance of the woman : she might be a respectable tradesman's wife, or a gentleman's house-keeper, or anything except a lady. The man was tall, wore a cloak with velvet trimmings, and a three-cornered hat, which surmounted a face perfectly smooth and a well-powdered head. Lady Belmore and her three attendants swept by them, neither noticed nor taking any notice. Lord Belmore, instantly that his glance fell upon them, swerved to one side, taking his lady-companion with him. He had already drawn the collar of his overcoat up over the lower part of his face, and now, with a hasty stride, he carried the lady who hung upon his arm towards that outlet in the barrier which was furthest removed

from the little group. Just then, as chance directed, there came rushing down the steps a crowd of some hundreds of well-dressed people, almost all of whom swarmed through the outlet where the man and woman were standing. Whether they carried the pair away with them by the impulse of that rush, or whether the pair made an effort to pierce through the throng and got blocked up in it, the closest observer would have found it difficult to determine ; but this much Lord Belmore saw : he saw the man and the woman struggling to reach the further outlet, just as he was passing through it, and entered his carriage after handing his companion in, uncertain whether they were near him or far removed from him when the door was shut.

The supper-party at Evans's was a complete success. The merits of the play as well as of the principal performer were discussed with judgment and perfect impartiality. The Irish poet sang some beautiful lyrics of his own composing, set to the music of his country ; the Scotchman repeated odes second to none in the English

language; and the Englishman criticised both with an acrimony which would have disgusted, but for the wit which tempered and gave it lustre. As to Lord Belmore, he laboured, and not unsuccessfully, to hold his own in that brilliant throng. He drank freely, and, as the wine took effect, rose to the level of the occasion. The short hours of the morning were considerably advanced before the party broke up, and the drive to Belmore House was performed under a cloudless moon and in profound silence.

CHAPTER VI.

DOGBERRIES.

WE left M. de Couvré wrapt up in his cloak, and preparing to renew a search which he had carried on from day to day for rather more than five months, without, as it seemed, approaching one jot nearer than when he first began to the object which he sought. He turned his face now, as he had often done before, towards Bow Street, and made direct to the office of the magistrate there. It was a very different place in all its appliances then from what it is now. Metropolitan police in those days there were none. The guardians of the night were parish watchmen, generally old, not unfrequently feeble, whose habit it was to call the hours as they struck, and to warn thereby

thieves, and other *enfants d'industrie*, that they were free to prosecute their several callings without any danger of interruption for a space, say, of fifty minutes. As to the day, that was supposed to take care of itself. A few very shrewd but unscrupulous men, called Bow Street runners, either knew, or were assumed to know, all the bad characters in London—all their haunts—all their projects; while bailiffs and tipstaves were prepared, on the due issue of writs, to take into custody unfortunate debtors, and to shut them up in sponging-houses or jails, possibly for life, for the value of five pounds. Meanwhile the great conservator of the peace of the metropolis held his court in Bow Street, whence orders went forth which none would venture to disobey, and before which criminals and suspected persons were arraigned and examined. The chief magistrate at Bow Street was, indeed, so late as the beginning of the present century, a very great man;—one whom not even a minister of state could approach without awe, and whom all others of the king's subjects thought of very much as the believers in the veiled

prophet may have thought of him whose face they were never permitted to see, though of his power the consciousness was always present with them.

Towards this awful tribunal M. de Couvré bent his steps in the afternoon of that wintry day of which we have thus far traced the progress. He was feeble and somewhat exhausted with his long walk in the morning. His progress was therefore slow, but he came within view of his destination a good hour before the wintry sun had begun to go down. The office was still open, and before the doors several men, distinguished only from other civilians by wearing each of them a red waistcoat under his blue coat, were lounging. They seemed to recognise the stranger the moment he appeared, and to be aware of the object of his coming.

“Here he is again, Joe!” observed one of their number, who seemed to exercise a certain amount of authority over the rest. “Poor devil! I’m really very sorry for him. He forks out pretty freely for a foreigner, though, and we really must try to

do something for him. What do you say? shall I state his case to the Beak?"

"What good would that do, Mr Townsend?" replied the person addressed as Joe; "the Beak could not help him a bit more than we. Besides, who cares to interfere in cases like his? aint they as plenty as blackberries? and if we set ourselves to ferret them all out, who'd be the gainers? You leave him to me: I'll give him a bit of advice that'll be worth a fiver if it's worth a penny!"

"I daresay," replied Mr Townsend, laughing, "as well worth the one as the other, I make no doubt. But what's your dodge?"

"You'll hear presently; now let's make as if business were brisk."

Upon this they all assumed an air of great animation; first one and then another hurrying, after a brief consultation, from the street through the office-door. The last to enter was Mr Townsend, leaving Joe by himself. But just as M. de Couvré came within a few paces of the scene of action Mr Townsend returned, and entered with

his brother runner into close conference. Both appeared to be entirely unaware of the stranger's approach. They stood close together face to face, seeing everything, yet making as if they saw nothing, and were attracted to him at last only by his well-known voice addressing them. Then both turned and greeted him.

"Ah, M. de Couvré," said the senior of the two, not without some sympathy in his manner, though it was tinged not a little with contempt, "can't say I'm glad to see you. I'm afraid your coming here again bodes no good. Haven't you found her yet?"

"No, sir, no. I can't trace her in the least. I have advertised in all the newspapers, yet no answers come."

"Did you try advertising in French, as I advised you?"

"Yes, yes, in French and Italian too; but still there is no reply."

"Poor gentleman! poor gentleman!" interposed Joe; "I wonder if what I'm thinking of would do any good!"

"Sir," replied M. de Couvré, "if you can think of anything that will give me but the faintest shadow of hope I shall be for ever grateful to you. They tell me that if the magistrate could himself be interested in the case, something might come of it. I've not much money, God help me! but I will gladly give two guineas or more to any one who will be so good as to get me an audience."

"Well, that's handsome in you," replied Joe, "but the thing can't be done just yet. The Beak's very busy, isn't he, Mr Townsend? He couldn't be seen to-day, could he?"

"Seen to-day!" replied Mr Townsend, "I should think not. Why, you know, he has the great Spitalfields murder before him now, and to-morrow he will be busy putting the Alien Act in force against ten spies. Ay, by the Lord! ten spies, M. de Couvré, all taken at different places. One in Dover, one at John of Groat's House, one down at Myrther Tidvale in Wales, two at Bantry Bay, three——"

"But I wouldn't take up ten minutes of his

time. I could state my case so clearly, so quickly, that in five minutes he would be able to advise, and then my mind would be at rest—at least I think so.”

“Now it’s no use your supposing anything of the sort, M. de Couvré. Sir John knows nothing about you more than my friend Mr Jenkins, and I have told him. He never seed the runaway more than we done. He hasn’t a notion any more nor we who can have took her away. Why, God bless my soul! we haven’t so much as a picture or a print to guide us. How should he put you on a new scent without something of that sort? And if we can’t, who go about everywhere, how should Sir John? Lord love you! he never moves from that there arm-chair, except it be to go home to his wittles and his bed. If you’ve anything fresh to say, why, Mr Jenkins and I will hear it. If not, I’m afraid it would only be throwing good money after bad, if we got you the interview; which we couldn’t possibly do under three guineas, if for so little——”

“Get me the interview, and the three guineas

shall be forthcoming—get me the interview, for I have something new to communicate. You say that if you had a portrait to guide you, there would be a better chance of finding her; well, I have a portrait which is still like, though it was taken a good many years ago, while she was little more than a child, a young girl scarcely arrived at womanhood.”

“Ah!” interposed the man answering to the name of Joe, “there’s something in that. Let’s see the picture if you’ve got it here. We may do something with that——”

“Pardon me, gentlemen,” replied M. de Couvré, “I mean you no disrespect, but the portrait is very sacred in my eyes. I brought it with me to show to the magistrate if I could gain admittance to his presence; but I couldn’t show it to anybody else. Here are the guineas, take me only to the magistrate, and I will pay the fee willingly.”

“Why, you wouldn’t think of doing anything so foolish as offer money to a magistrate in open court, would you?”

"Anything that is usual, anything that is right. I don't care how the money's disposed of, so that I get what I beg for. Only introduce me to the magistrate, and you can have the fee now, or when the interview is over."

"I'm really very sorry for the gentleman," said Mr Townsend, addressing himself to his brother officer. "I think we must put a bold face on it and get him what he wants, if that is possible. I'll go to Sir John myself, and if anybody can persuade him to break through a rule, I'm the man, as you know."

"You're the man, Mr Townsend, there can be no doubt of that. He'll do it, M. de Couvré, if anybody can; keep up a good heart. A minute's talk with Sir John would be worth five guineas five times told to you. Didn't you say five guineas?"

"No, sir," said M. de Couvré, "I said three. But three, or five, or whatever it may be, I will not grudge the last farthing I possess, if I see but a prospect of recovering my lost treasure."

"Five guineas will do it, I'm pretty sure,"

said Mr Townsend, turning at the same time and disappearing through the doorway.

M. de Couvré, left alone with the eloquent and disinterested Mr Jenkins, appeared to shrink altogether within himself. He paid no heed whatever to the words of encouragement and consolation which fell from that humane individual. He did not hear, at all events he returned no answer to his questions. No great interval of time, however, was allowed for this one-sided conversation, for presently a third officer came out, and begged M. de Couvré to follow him. He obeyed the summons, and being led through a somewhat dark passage, was ushered by a side door into the court-room. It was quite empty, except that upon the bench of justice sat a portly gentleman in a lawyer's gown and wig, with two or three officers or runners standing behind him. Among these officers M. de Couvré failed to detect Mr Townsend, though he looked eagerly round for him. The magistrate's face was grave and stern. There was a cast or squint in the eyes as he raised them from some papers which

lay before him, and directed them towards the stranger ; and his voice when he spoke was harsh.

“ Mr Townsend has persuaded me to see you, sir, and to hear what you’ve got to say ; but you must be quick about it—my time’s not my own.”

“ Sir, permit me to offer you my humble thanks for condescending to see me, and to hear my sad——”

“ Damn the thanks, let’s hear the story ! I’m not here to listen to blarney.”

“ Six months ago I was, though an exile, as happy as a man could be who had lost his country and his home. My niece, dearer to me than a daughter, was everything to me—my prop, my stay, the one ewe lamb that lay in my bosom.”

“ And your niece ran away from you—is that it ? ”

“ Some scoundrel stole her, she didn’t run away. She was inveigled, deceived, stolen, as this letter which she left for me on my table will show. Take it, sir, read it, and judge for yourself.”

"I can't read your French jargon ; don't hand that to me, but tell me what you want, and tell it at once."

"I want to recover my darling. I want you to put the law in force, and to get her back for me."

"Get her back, my good man—how can I do that ? I might put these gentlemen on her track if I knew what she was like, or if you could give us any sort of clue. Did anybody use to come after her when she lived with you ? and if anybody did, who was it ?"

"Nobody came after her that I'm aware of, but she lived too much in public. 'Noble creature that she was, she put aside her gentle breeding, outraged her delicate sensitiveness, and earned a subsistence for herself and me, as a singer on the stage. It was a terrible thought at first to submit to such degradation, but what are we poor exiles to do !—Can you help me ?"

"Blowed if I can, unless you give me a better clue than this. Lord love you ! it's the commonest thing in the world for girls to go off from

the stage in this country, especially if they're pretty. What was she like?"

"Here, sir, is her portrait. I brought it on purpose to show to you. Treat it tenderly, I pray you," said the old man, handing the miniature at the same time to the occupant of the bench. "I pray over it as I would before a portrait of the Virgin—not for the world would I have it profaned."

The magistrate took the miniature in his hand and held it up. He held it up, however, not for his own satisfaction exclusively, but for that of his attendant officers likewise, all of whom reached forward and gazed at it over his shoulder. A rude sort of whistle escaped from the magistrate's lips, and he said something which seemed to amuse his myrmidons, for they burst into a coarse laugh. The blood of the Frenchman began to boil—his eyes flashed as he gave utterance to a malediction, which, however, as it was uttered in French, nobody seemed to care about.

"Keep your temper, Mr Descouver—isn't that your name?" interposed the magistrate: "we

allow no disrespect to the bench in this country. If these gentlemen be to help you in ferreting out your runaway, it stands to reason that they must know what she's like. Now, I'll give you a bit of advice : Go to all the theatres in London, to one after another, every night if you like ; these gentlemen, or some of them, are great playgoers likewise ; they'll see you there, though you don't see them. Take your seat in the pit, and cast your eyes about you, especially in the direction of the third-tier boxes ; you've a chance of seeing her there some of these nights, and if you don't, why, then, walk into the saloons. Many a runaway we've got back for her friends by following this course, and I recommend you to adopt it."

" Is that all ? "

" Yes, that's all for the present, and a very satisfactory all it ought to be to you. Mr Jenkins, see this gentleman out, and don't forget the fee."

Mr Jenkins, who stood close to the bench, descended immediately into the area where the

Frenchman was standing, restored to him the portrait, and requested him to follow. M. de Couvré obeyed mechanically, and reached the dark passage beyond without giving a thought to the pecuniary engagement into which he had entered. But his guide was not so oblivious.

"Now, sir, the five guineas," he said, holding out his hand.

"True, true, the guineas, but not five—not five—only three. I haven't five guineas in the world."

"You are a pretty fellow! aint you? You come here and get us to do the wrong thing, and then try to beat the court down in its fees! Five, I say—five guineas! Stump up, or, by the living jingo, I'll commit you!"

"Take all I have," replied the poor Frenchman, emptying his pocket of the four guineas which he had brought with him. "You may do with me what you will, but this is my all! my all!"

"Then go about your business like a beggarly Frenchman as you are," answered the officer, grasping the coins and transferring them to his

own pocket. "Blowed if you don't fare worse if ever you show yourself here again!"

The poor Frenchman, having replaced the precious miniature next his heart, passed out of the doorway into Bow Street, and turned homewards. He heard but indistinctly the peals of laughter with which the court that he had just quitted rang.

"Didn't I do the Beak famous?" ejaculated Mr Townsend, flinging aside the gown and wig, and with difficulty getting his words out, so intensely were his risible faculties excited. "Blowed if ever anybody saw the like! Well, Jenkins," he continued, as that worthy joined the conclave, "let's see the guineas, the five guineas that the old muff paid for the excellent advice we gave him."

"The beggar hadn't five guineas to pay. Egad! you should have seen how I frightened him when I spoke of committal. He'll not trouble you any more, that I'll be bound for."

"What!" cried Mr Townsend, "you don't mean to say he bilked you?"

“ No, no, not quite that ; I got four out of him. Poor devil ! we’ve cleaned him out, I reckon. You can’t get more from a cat than his skin.”

“ Oh, well, four’s better nor nothing. But wasn’t it capital ?—didn’t I do the Beak like a trump ? ”

“ No doubt—no doubt ; it’s the best farce I ever see — ha ! ha ! ha ! You couldn’t have done it, though, but for the hint I gave you. The theatre was the dodge ; nothing like it—nothing like it ! I wonder what Sir John would say if he knew how capitally we act for him on fitting occasions.”

CHAPTER VII.

ADVICE FOLLOWED.

MEANWHILE the subject of this sprightly dialogue was bending his steps wearily towards St Ann's, Soho, indignant at the treatment which he had himself received, still more angry because of the want of respect with which his precious miniature had been treated, and altogether at a loss how to reconcile the behaviour of the magistrate with his own notions of what might be looked for in a person filling so responsible an office under the crown of civilised England. Indignation, anger, and astonishment, however, all faded away as the road seemed to lengthen out before him. He had greatly overtaxed his physical strength, and gradually but surely the old image,

which had filled his mind for many long months past, filled it again entirely. He saw nothing as he tottered along except one beautiful countenance beaming upon him with an expression half tender, half joyous—one fairy form, round which all that gives grace and dignity to womanhood seemed to have gathered. His ear took in, for it could not do otherwise, the tramp of passing crowds, the hubbub of many voices, the rattle of carts and carriages. But these various sounds, as they passed into the sensorium, blended and became one with the tones of a low silver voice, which spoke to him of love, and duty, and gratitude. "Is she lost to me for ever? shall I greet her again no more? My darling! my darling! only let me know where you are, and why you left me! I was not unkind to you, was I? I never meant to be unkind. She was the very apple of mine eye. Shall I never look upon that face again, except in my dreams? Shall I listen to that voice no more, except as it speaks to me now?"

So ran his thoughts, all in one direction, his

pace slackening as these grew more and more despondent, till he found himself in a narrow street, flanked on the side opposite to that along which he passed by a huge building, which he recognised as the side wall of Covent Garden Theatre. A sudden light flashed into his mind. He recalled the words of the magistrate—coarsely uttered, but not on that account to be neglected—and a ray of hope, brighter than any which for many a day had cheered him, fell upon his spirit.

“Why should I not? I’ll do it—I’ll do it,” he said to himself, and speaking in his native tongue. “I’ll go to them all, one after another; who knows but good may come of it?”

So saying he hurried across the street, made for the nearest door, beside which two oil-lamps were burning, and found it shut. Disappointed, but not balked, he continued his progress till he found himself beside the main entrance, up the flight of steps conducting to which he hurried. Again disappointment awaited him. Here, too, the doors were closed, and with a sad heart he

was descending the steps, when a boy flourished a play-bill in his face and asked him to buy.

"There is no play," he said to the boy; "you see the house is not open; why offer me that?"

"But it will be in two hours, sir," replied the boy; "the houses don't open till six, and it's only four now, or a very little arter."

"True, true; I had forgotten: let me have the *affiche*."

He put his hand into his pocket in search of the copper which the urchin asked for his wares, and only then had the fact recalled to his recollection that he was penniless. He had given all the money about him to the officer.

"I'm very sorry," he said to the lad, "but I can't buy now; I've no money. You are quite right, the house will open two hours hence."

"Why, what a green you be! To be sure it do. The doors allays opens at six, and the performance begins at seven. Don't you see that on the bills? Can't you read?"

"To be sure—to be sure," muttered the old man to himself. "God help me! my faculties

are forsaking me. I shall forget everything—everything except my one bitter sorrow.”

He descended the steps as these words escaped him, hurried through the market-place, and, taking with marvellous accuracy every short cut, reached No. 39 St Ann Street just as the church-clock struck five. He rang the bell, and almost immediately the door was opened by Mrs Todd herself.

“There now—there now!” exclaimed the good-hearted landlady; “you be come at last, be you? You’ll kill yourself, Mounseer; that’s certain. And the steak that I dressed for you with my own hands, why, it would be cold, but I’ve kep it on the trevit by the kitchen-fire this hour past. Come in—come in, and eat your dinner. No, no; not up-stairs. I’ve laid it in the parlour, and got you a pint of good ale, and as mealy and well-boiled a potato as ever gentleman need set his teeth to.” She threw open the parlour-door as she spoke, and exhibited to M. de Couvré’s gaze as pleasant a spectacle as a man hungry and tired would wish to set his eyes upon.

A bright fire blazed in the grate ; a dinner-table, neatly covered, was set out to the best advantage by the light of two mould-candles ; and a shining pint-pot, with a rummer-glass standing beside it, flanked the only cover which her modesty had permitted her to lay. M. de Couvré, however, made as if he would pass on to the staircase ; and when regard for the man so far overcame respect for the gentleman as to make her put herself directly in his way, he waved her to stand aside, thanking her, however, for all her kindness.

“ Not to-night, good Mrs Todd. There’s no time for anything of the sort now. I’ve seen himself, and he advised me to go to the theatre ; and I mean to go to them all, one after another. I shouldn’t have time to eat anything, even if I had the inclination, which I have not.”

“ Heard ever woman the like ? You’ve taken no food all this blessed day ; and you talk of going to the theatre ! Mr Discover — Mr Discover, do you mean to bring an honest woman into trouble ? You’ll die, and be brought home

a corpse to No. 39, and there'll be a coroner and an inquest ; and my lodgers will leave me, and I'll never get any more. And all this because you're so obstinate that you won't eat a mouthful of vittles, though it's been dressed on purpose for you. I didn't think you would treat me so."

She put her apron to her eyes, and wept. Now M. de Couvré, whatever else he might be able to bear, never in all his life could resist a woman's tears. He begged Mrs Todd not to distress herself, and turned at once into the parlour.

"But I must make haste, dear madam. There's always a crush for good places in the pit, and to the pit I'm desired to go. From the front rows of the pit, you know, we can command a view of the whole house. If she be there, I will see her. Yes, yes, I will see her."

"Oh, that's it !" replied the landlady ; "I see what you're put up to. He advises you to look for her in the theatres. Did he drop ever a word about the saloons ?"

"To be sure he did. 'Look well through the

boxes, especially into the third tier ; and, if you don't see her there, look for her in the saloons.' These were his very words."

"The slandering scoundrel!" muttered Mrs Todd ; "the cruel beast ! But why not ?—why not ? The best of them, poor things ! come to that at last ; and so may she, though I don't believe it. Well, now," she continued, speaking aloud, "I understand what you are after ; and if you'll only eat your dinner like a good gentleman, I'll get myself ready and go with you. Two pair of eyes, you know, be better nor one ; and I haven't seen a play ever so long. Where do you mean to go ? If it's all the same to you, I'd like to go to Drury Lane, because my first-floor's gone crazy about a new actress, who, he says, is the beautifulest and the cleverest creature that ever was seen."

"By all means," replied the Frenchman. "Drury Lane to-night, Covent Garden to-morrow night, the Lyceum the night after, the Haymarket the night after that, the——"

"Stop, stop !" interrupted Mrs Todd ; "one at

a time—one at a time. You forget that people don't get into them places without paying."

"Why, I never used to pay," he said, looking up sadly from the chair upon which he had seated himself.

"Ah! that was when——" Here the good woman interrupted herself, and the poor Frenchman, catching what was meant, hung his head, and was silent.

By this time the steak was brought in hot from the kitchen, and the potatoes soon followed, fully justifying by their appearance the description which Mrs Todd had given of them. She helped her lodger to disencumber himself of his cloak, and having cut off a portion and placed it before him on a plate, she went away to equip herself for the expedition. In ten minutes she returned, cloaked and bonneted, to find that the steak, tempting as it was, had attracted but little of her lodger's attention. The ale was indeed drunk up, but of the more solid elements in the repast only a few morsels were consumed. It was something, however, to have prevailed upon him

to eat at all, for there is a good deal of nourishment, so at least the honest landlady took for granted, in a pint of XXX ale. She therefore refrained from delivering a second lecture, which would have come too late, and declared herself ready to attend Mounseer whithersoever he might conduct her.

“But you must excuse me, sir ; no more walking for you at present, nor for me neither. My first-floor had ordered a coach to dine at the Mansion House, or to go somewhere else, but he’s took poorly and can’t go, so he’s lent it to me. It’s at the door, and must be paid for at any rate, so if you be quite sure that you won’t eat no more, the sooner we set out the better.”

M. de Couvré, on whom every moment’s delay pressed with the weight of ages, rose immediately. He resumed his cloak, and the two quitted the parlour together. They found a neat glass coach standing in the street, into which they entered, and were driven, under Mrs Todd’s directions, towards Drury Lane. As they approached the theatre, hand after hand was held up to the coach-

window, and voice after voice calling out, "Bill of the play!" One of these bills Mrs Todd secured at the cost of a penny. And now, early as it was, they found themselves at the tail of a string of carriages, to win their way through which, before the performance should be half over, seemed to Mrs Todd's inexperienced eye a thing impossible. She therefore suggested, after fidgeting in her seat for a while, that they should alight when they were about midway between St Martin's Church and the theatre, and press forward on foot. M. de Couvré offered no objection, and the string was pulled, when he suddenly recollected that he was without money.

"What shall we do?" he cried, wringing his hands: "your kindness, dear madam, stayed my ascent to my apartment, and I have come abroad again absolutely penniless."

"I daresay we have got enough between us," replied Mrs Todd, coolly taking out her purse and reckoning up its contents. "Oh yes! here's just as many shillings as will get us into the pit—we don't want more, you know. You'll be able to

walk home after you've rested an hour or two—won't you, Mounseer?"

"Oh yes," replied M. de Couvré, "perfectly. I'm very strong now; your beefsteak did me all the good in the world, and I will pay my debt to-morrow."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" was the sole answer vouchsafed to this latter remark.

They alighted from the carriage, with some difficulty made their way to the *trottoir*, and were carried along on the crest, so to speak, of a living wave, till they arrived within a hundred yards or so of the point at which they were aiming. In front of the main entrance, and on either side, swarmed a crowd of many hundred persons, pushing and struggling, not to gain admittance, for the doors were still shut, but to win such places as would enable them to enter with the first rush when the entrance should be open to them. Mrs Todd was no bad hand in a throng. In this respect she was far in advance of her companion, who willingly put himself under the shadow of her wing, and fared better in consequence than

he would have done had he been alone. She gave as good as she got both in word and deed, and achieved at last a position as favourable as circumstances would admit of. It was not one either of dignity or ease. The sensitive nature of the Frenchman winced under it; but what cared Mrs Todd for a jam! She could push out her elbows as resolutely as the rest of them, and being wiry and full of endurance, kept a space comparatively free for his use. At last the doors flew open, and then began a strife upon which no sane man, we venture humbly to suggest, having once had experience of it will ever enter again. It was too fierce, however, to be lasting. Lifted off his legs, and holding on by Mrs Todd's cloak, his own being with difficulty kept out of the clutches of swearing men and shrieking women, M. de Couvré was carried, he could not tell how, through a hall and along a narrow passage. There he found his feet again, and the entrance-fee being duly paid by the lady, they made their way, arm-in-arm, to the pit. All the front seats back to the tenth or twelfth row were already occupied, and had not

the lady been more master of her wits than the gentleman, even further back than this they must have been driven. But giving him an encouraging pull by the hand, she pressed bravely on, and landed herself and him as nearly as possible in the centre of the area.

“ We’ll do nicely here, Mounseer ! ” she exclaimed, squatting herself down, and wiping and fanning her face with her pocket-handkerchief. “ I dare say you’re not accustomed to this sort of thing, but we don’t mind it. They mean no harm them people ; they are true John Bulls, they are. All they want is to get their pennyworth, and on the whole I think we’ve got ours. They’ll sit down in front when the play begins, never fear. They’re only admiring the house now, just as you may do if you like to look round. Deary me, how hot it is ! Wouldn’t I just like a glass of ginger-beer ! ”

M. de Couvré scarcely heard ; he certainly paid no attention to his companion. He sat for a minute or two, shuddering at the recollection of the scene through which he had just passed ; and then, as if stirred by a sudden impulse, stood bolt

upright, and gazed at the boxes, with his back turned to the stage. They filled, but more slowly than the pit—one party after another dropping in, and occupying the chairs or benches which hired officials had kept for them. This was along the two lower tiers, except in some three or four on each side nearest to the stage, which, being private boxes, could not be invaded by the crowd. It was different in the third tier. Women arrayed, some in evening, some in morning attire, took their places there at random, intermingling with men whose dress was such as is rarely seen now except in the hunting-field. Coats of all colours, bright in their metal buttons, yellow waistcoats, white cords, and top-boots. Those, in the days of which we are writing, made up the costume of the bucks who, day by day, aired themselves between the hours of two and five on either side of Bond Street. And these abounded now in that tier of boxes towards which M. de Couvré had been especially directed to cast his eyes. He scanned them through and through, over and over, watching each batch of new-comers as they arrived,

but seeing nothing on which his eye cared to linger.

By-and-by the orchestra struck up, and in due time, before a house crammed from floor to ceiling, the stage-curtain rose. There was an immediate cry, "Sit down!" "Hats off!" and M. de Couvré, among the rest, was compelled to obey it. He sat down, and so did his companion. What to him was the pageant which riveted the attention of that vast assembly! What the charm of the acting, which wrung tears from the eyes of the simple, as well as of the educated, and carried away with it the sympathies of all classes! His thoughts were far away from these things. In vain for him O'Farrel breathed forth the words,—

"Oh! swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove also variable."

He heard them not, or, hearing, took no note. Not so Mrs Todd. She had come with the most benevolent intentions. It was her settled purpose to give up all her care to the investigation on which he was bent; but before the first dialogue

in the drama, her goodly resolution fled like darkness before the dawn. Nor could she, even when first the drop-scene fell, so entirely withdraw her attention from the play as to contribute, in any material degree, to the success of his endeavours. Conscience, however, began by degrees to stir within her ; and at the close of the second act, she also stood up and looked around her. For a while her gaze was vacant enough, but at last, with a cry which made itself heard over the buzz of conversation, she grasped M. de Couvré by the arm.

“Look there!—look there!” she exclaimed, pointing in the direction, not of the third tier, but of the private boxes. “Don’t you see?—don’t you see?”

“See what?” replied M. de Couvré, roused to a state of high excitement. “Where is she?”

“There!—there!” cried Mrs Todd again. “Oh yes, I understand,” she continued, speaking hurriedly, “but that won’t do. Come with me, Mr Discover. Never mind the play. If you hope to see her again, come with me.”

Without waiting for an answer she began scrambling over the benches ; M. de Couvré following with all the eagerness which hope newly awakened inspires. Not without much resistance, and many outbursts of indignation from those whom they incommoded, the excited pair forced their way to the exit ; and right through the barrier, without thinking for a moment of pass-tickets, they ran rather than walked into the hall, whence the staircase leading to the boxes springs off.

“ We want to change our places from the pit,” she said to the ticket-collector ; “ there’s a party in one of them boxes that me and this gentleman want to join ; let us pass.”

“ Surely, ma’am,” replied the check-taker, “ only give me your pass-tickets, and pay the difference.”

“ Pass-tickets ! I forgot them. Wait here, Mounseer, and I’ll go back for them.”

And away she ran ; but she ran in vain. The guardian of the manager’s interests was faithful to his trust. He could give no pass-tickets to persons coming in. If they’d been in at all they

ought to have got them before coming out. Remember her ! How could he pretend to remember anybody in such a crowd. "No, no, good lady, the thing can't be done, and there's an end."

Back she came to the hall, mortified and angry. She would have willingly paid for both of them, full price to the boxes, but her purse was empty. What was to be done ?

"Well," said the ticket-collector, "if you be bent on seeing your friends, and have not the means of going to them, the next best thing is to wait till they come to you. You may bide here if you like. I won't send you away."

They did bide there, with what result was stated in a former chapter. Mrs Todd repeated her cry as Lady Belmore and her party descended the stairs. She took no notice whatever of her ladyship, however, any more than her ladyship condescended to notice M. de Couvré ; but when she saw Lord Belmore and the lady on his arm swerve from one side to the other of the outlet, she again seized her companion by the hand, and made a dash to carry him over. Then came the

throng pouring out of the house ; then a violent struggle on her part to press through it ; then a failure, and a vision of the objects of her search passing into the carriage which was at hand to receive them, and driving away.

“ Come home now, Mr Discover ; it’s no use to-night ; but, please God, I’ll find her out for you if she be above ground—see if I don’t ! ”

“ I never saw her, Madame Todd ! She was not there ! Oh, no, no ! you must have forgotten how beautiful she is ! Did I not show you the miniature ? ”

“ Miniature or no miniature, I’ve seen enough to-night to set me thinking—ay, and working too. Let us go home, Mounseer ; we’ll do no good waiting any longer here.”

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER THE FEAST.

THE drive home from Evans's to Belmore House was a silent one. Lord Belmore had taken more wine than did him good, and lay back in a corner of the carriage mute but restless. Something not unlike a groan escaped him from time to time, but to articulate sounds he gave no utterance. My lady was out of humour with him, with herself, and with all the world. The memory of her husband's seizures in the box, and his steady determination not to see the play out, troubled her, and the more so that his boisterous merriment at supper had quite dispelled the alarm which naturally took possession of her when she first noticed his illness. Moreover, my

lady abhorred excess in drink. In an age when gentlemen were not ashamed to come reeling into drawing-rooms, and ladies in general made light of the rude things they said and did, Lady Belmore had from her girlhood set her face against such outrageous indecency, and not without some show of reason traced her own fall to this strong feeling. For her first husband had been one of a set who prided themselves on their capacity for imbibing. It was even rumoured of him that, if not a member, he was more than an occasional guest, of that notorious club which held its orgies and practised its profanities in Debenham Abbey. These facts had been hidden from her during the season of courtship, and she married, more to please her family than herself, a man for whom she entertained no special preference at the moment, and who soon forfeited what little esteem she had given him by his manner of life after their marriage. Now Lord Belmore, whatever his faults and failings in other respects might be, was no toper. Neither his tastes nor his constitution fitted him for deep potations, of which one consequence

was that, in spite of a steady adherence to a line of politics which it pleased George, Prince of Wales, at that time to adopt, he was honoured with few invitations to Carlton House. For a brief space, indeed, subsequently to his invasion of the sanctities of domestic life, the heir-apparent of the British throne seemed disposed to make a good deal of him. He was then a young man and a commoner, his father being still alive. He was a member likewise of the House of Commons, and an officer in his Majesty's Guards; and his Royal Highness, taking his own view of the transaction, not only invited him to dinner, but proposed his health in a bumper as that of one who had well sustained the credit of the corps. The gallant Lothario, however, could not or would not get drunk, and his royal host, after one or two further attempts to inspire him with the lofty ambition of adding intemperance to profligacy, gave him up as a hopeless subject. He ceased to be either befeasted or bepraised at Carlton House. It cannot be said that Lord Belmore experienced any profound regret at being cut off

from so much of royal favour. A man of refined tastes, elegant manners, and fastidious almost to sensitiveness, the boisterous merriment and coarse wit of Carlton House had no charms for him. He took the loss of courtly favour, therefore, with great complacency, and consoled himself for what was inevitable in the sort of society which, under existing circumstances, it was still in his power to gather round him.

The carriage reached Belmore House as the stable-clock was striking three, and Lord and Lady Belmore stood together in the great hall while the bed-candles were lighted. They were alone, the servants having withdrawn, and Lady Belmore made a move towards the door.

"I say, Augusta," exclaimed Lord Belmore abruptly, and speaking rather thick, "I forgot to tell you that I must be off early in the morning. I'm wanted down at Baddlesmere, and mean to start before you're up. But you will follow with the boys as soon as you can."

"Do you mean to make a long stay, then? for you know I hate Baddlesmere."

"Hate, or not hate, to Baddlesmere you must go—ay, and remain there too, dam-me."

"My lord, you forget yourself. I was ashamed of you at supper, and I am ashamed of you now. You may go to Baddlesmere if you choose : I won't."

"Won't!—egad! that's strong language : won't! but you will and you shall!"

He rang the bell violently, and his valet made his appearance.

"Fleming, pack my trunks, all of them—mind you, all of them—and tell John to have the chariot at the door punctually at eight o'clock ; get ready yourself likewise : I'm going to Baddlesmere to remain some time."

"Very well, my lord."

"And Fleming, tell my lady's woman to get her mistress's things ready also, and desire Adam to have the coach and the *fourgon* packed, so as to follow with Lady Belmore and the young gentlemen on Monday or Tuesday at the latest. Say to Bruce that I must see him before I start. Go and give these directions before the people

get to bed, and then come to me in my dressing-room."

The valet withdrew, and Lady Belmore, who had listened to all these directions without speaking a word, faced about. The light from the candle which she held in her hand—for the lamps had been put out, and only the embers of a wooden fire burnt low in the grate—fell strong upon her face, and showed that it was pale with excitement. Her blue eyes flashed, and she said in a tone constrained, and therefore low,—

"As far as I am concerned, I shall countermand these orders. I remain here as long, that is to say, as the law will allow me."

"Madam, the law will not allow you to remain in any one of my houses an hour longer than it pleases me. If you choose to leave me altogether you can do so ; you won't be without experience in such matters."

"Man ! man ! are you a man to speak to me thus ?" She said no more, but, rushing out of the hall, betook herself to her own chamber. There, in spite of the presence of her maid — whom,

however, she did not notice, and before whom she usually put complete restraint upon her own feelings—she dashed the candlestick down upon the dressing-table, and, throwing herself upon her face on the bed, wept bitterly. “Has it come to this?—has it come to this? Oh me! oh me! what shall I do? I may leave him if I like! I am not without experience in such matters!! Yes, I will leave him,” she continued, springing up. Then, for the first time as it seemed, she discovered that she was not alone. She became calm in a moment.

“Louise,” she said, “why did you not let me know you were here?”

“I beg pardon, my lady; I was getting your ladyship’s night-dress out of the drawer, and couldn’t suppose you wouldn’t see me. I’m afraid the tooth pains your ladyship very much to-night. I never heard you complain of it as you did now.”

Lady Belmore looked at the speaker, more than half suspecting that she played a part, but the young woman kept her countenance, and her mis-

tress, willing to be deceived, allowed herself to be deceived. She acted on the hint which the domestic had given, and became a martyr to toothache. There was great eagerness, of course, to apply hot fomentations externally, and to drop laudanum upon wool and wrap it about the tooth ;—and all the while the process of undressing went forward. Nor was another process affecting the inner man of the patient slow of beginning. With the necessity to control the outward show of bitterness came the thought that it might be wise to keep under the feeling itself. The struggle, if there was one, might be sharp, but it was short.

“ My lord goes to Baddlesmere to-morrow, Louise ; and we are to follow on Monday or Tuesday. Do you think you can get ready in time ? ”

“ Oh yes, my lady, I daresay we can, on Tuesday. But has my lord forgotten that we have a dinner-party at home on Wednesday ? ”

“ No, I don't think he has ; but the business which calls him down is urgent—something, I

believe, about the coming elections—and we are likely, it seems, to be kept some time in the country. It's well that we had no engagements sooner ; there will be plenty of time to make our excuses to the people who were to have dined here on Wednesday."

" Yes, my lady, plenty of time, and to-morrow your ladyship will probably do as you did the day before yesterday, make the gentlemen who come very happy without my lord."

" To-morrow ?—oh yes ! I had forgotten. Not to-morrow, Louise, but to-day. Dear me ! it's close upon four o'clock. I mustn't keep you any longer out of bed."

" Never mind me, my lady ; I'm not at all tired or sleepy. I can't think of going till the pain abates."

" Thanks, Louise ; the pain has quite left me now. It was only a paroxysm, brought on, I believe, by the intense cold, and by sitting, as we came home, with one of the carriage-windows open at the top. Good-night, Louise. I can do very well without you now."

“Good-night, my lady.”

The maid retired, happy in the deceit which she had passed upon her mistress. Not a motion which her lady made, not a word which her lady spoke, had escaped the notice of the wary Abigail; yet it would be unjust towards her were we to insinuate that she had witnessed her lady's agony with indifference. Quite otherwise. Her lady's history was well known to Louise. She had come to her place only about a year ago; but the first proceeding of all domestics is to find out the secrets of the families into which they enter, and Louise had been both diligent and successful in reading the history of the house of Belmore. Of the knowledge thus acquired she made only so much use as promised to serve her own purpose. By an ostentatious display of deference, and even of sympathy, she ingratiated herself as far as any one could into her lady's confidence; and, always making a show to appear ignorant of facts, she soothed, without for a moment deceiving, the object of her tenderness. On the whole, she liked her lady, and was by her lady liked in

return. On one point, however, she erred. Seeing that between Lord and Lady Belmore there was a good deal of estrangement, she came to the conclusion that both of them either had, or were willing to have, *liaisons* elsewhere. Her great anxiety was to find out to which of her many male guests the lady had given her affections, in order that she might help in bringing them together. Watch as she might, however, pry as closely as she could, she was never able quite to satisfy herself that her lady cared for any one of her many friends more than for the rest. On one, indeed, a young painter, with whom as yet our readers have made no acquaintance, Lady Belmore did at times appear to bestow sweeter smiles than others secured. But then he was not young only, but decidedly handsome, whereas all the rest were either diminutive in person or men of a certain age, whose charm was in the richness of their intellect, certainly not in the grace of their forms or the beauty of their countenances. Therefore Miss Louise naturally concluded that the young painter was the favourite—

and so, perhaps, he was. But in letting her fancy go more free, the lady's-maid did injustice to her lady. The latter dearly loved that sort of half-tender talk which intellectual women know so well how to carry on, and which they never carry on so charmingly as when the object of their attentions happens to combine the twofold attraction of mental power and graceful form. But of going beyond the line of what is called innocent flirtation Lady Belmore never dreamed. Poor soul! she loved her lord with all her heart, with all her soul, with all her strength. She found out, or believed that she had discovered, when too late, that her love was infinitely less to him than his to her; and hence, as much with a view to put evil thoughts out of her mind and to stifle the desire to upbraid and quarrel with the object of her devotions, she had frequent recourse to that somewhat too free manner of dealing with other men, which, while it attained its object only partially, and for the moment, always left her, when the moment fled away, more despondent than ever. All this, of course, the Abigail could

not understand; and hence on the present, as on many a former occasion, she went to bed wondering, pitying, and determined to serve her mistress well in the matter of the young painter, or of anybody else, whenever the opportunity should arise.

As to the lady herself, she had by this time entirely mastered her anger. What could she do? How could she resist her fate? Another rupture of the marriage-tie, even if it were only by the process of legal separation, would sink her to the very lowest depths; and even more than this, was he not still the very light of her existence? the sun whose ray brought all the warmth to her which life could give? Was she not unjust to him; over-jealous of him; too exacting—too inconsiderate? Ay, she was all this and more, and, cost what it might, she would break the proud spirit that ruled within her and wrought so much harm. She would pray—pray! She pray! To whom—to what? She believed in nothing except the present. She was, in philosophy, a Positivist before the time. Who, among the wits and wise men of the age, so

much as professed Christianity?" True, Wesley and Whitfield had made a stir; and the poor, and the ignorant, and the outcasts, were their followers. And here and there an eccentric woman of rank—a Lady Huntingdon, and such-like—professed to be convinced by their reasoning, such as it was, and built them chapels, and attended on their ministrations. But, except the old King himself—and he had been more than once mad—and the bishops of whom he made friends, and whose business it was to teach Christianity because they were paid for it, no man or woman of any mark or note in society believed one word of what was called revelation, or paid the slightest respect to its requirements. Poor Lady Belmore did not know how to pray. Yet, if fervent wishes to do what is right partake at all of the nature of prayer—if resolutions bitterly entered into, and promises fervently uttered, may be regarded as the reflex of the repentance not to be repented of, she was from time to time not prayerful only, but very, very penitent. Alas! it cannot be said that she repented, even on such

occasions, of having left the drunken husband of her youth, and given herself to the man she adored. But she did repent of not having yielded, more than was her wont, to his caprices, and resolved never again to repel and worry him by a too exacting love. So thinking, so resolving, she fell asleep, to pass, in her dreams, through not a few of the incidents of her bygone life, strangely confused and blended with other events, which were either still in the future, so far as she was concerned, or must have come to her in some former state of existence. Poor woman! her dreams were rarely happy dreams. To-night they were peculiarly black and uncomfortable.

CHAPTER IX.

OF THINGS PAST.

THE grey dawn of the winter's morning struggled through the blinds with the light of his chamber-candles, when Lord Belmore, obeying the call of his servant, got out of bed. He made his toilet rapidly and descended to the breakfast-room. It was warm and cheerful. The shutters were still closed, and a huge fire blazed in the grate, towards which he advanced stretching out his hands before it. By-and-by he took a seat beside the table, upon which all the appliances of a substantial meal were laid out. But to these he paid little attention. A single cup of coffee, with a morsel of dry toast, appeased such appetite as he experienced. He rang the bell, and his valet, equipped for a journey, made his appearance.

“Tell Bruce I want him.”

Bruce, for so the house-steward was called, obeyed the summons, and stood before his lord—an elderly man, who had risen in the family from the condition of boy of all works to the office which he now held. Bruce belonged to an order of the genus *homo* which is now pretty well extinct. He had served the present lord's father when the present lord was a child, and felt himself to be as completely one of the family as if the noble blood of the Harrises ran in his own veins. Yet Bruce had had no easy time of it in the old lord's day. For Charles Lord Belmore was a harsh man—harsh to his wife, harsh to his children and to his servants—and to all who were dependent on him, capricious as well as stern. Not even such hindrances to perfect comfort in the servants' hall sufficed, however, a century or even less ago, to overcome that sense of reverence to their masters and mistresses which among the domestics of our titled and untitled aristocracy partook of devotion. They might not be blind to the faults of their supe-

riors, nor indifferent to the inconvenience thereby put upon themselves, but nothing which they either saw or suffered, sufficed, unless they were themselves radically depraved, to make them untrue, far less impertinent, to those set over them. We speak, of course, of families, and they were many, which went but little to London, nor mixed much in public life. The domestics of courtiers and *habitués* of fashionable society were then, as they are now, corrupt and unscrupulous enough. But Charles Lord Belmore had never been a courtier, and hence his servants, male and female, clung to Baddlesmere and its owners with a loyalty not in its nature less potent or less blind than that which caused so many of the best families both of England and of Scotland to sacrifice everything for the Stuarts, the most ungrateful, if not the least deserving, of princes.

Bruce was much attached to his present master. He had gone about as a lad leading their ponies, when the present Lord Belmore, and a brother younger than himself by two years, first began to ride ; and was advanced

from that office, as the children grew into young gentlemen, to be their especial valet. His position as such enabled him to make a true estimate of their characters, and he did so thoroughly. The younger, frank, open, and manly, might get into a thousand scrapes ; but they were not dishonourable scrapes, nor did he ever try by dishonourable means to evade their consequences. The elder, more timid, was not very scrupulous in adhering to truth, provided the way out of a difficulty seemed to be made easy by swerving from it. We are afraid that Bruce, though in the abstract an immense admirer of Sydney's system of morals, was in practice prone to adopt that of Francis. It is fair to add, however, that the only lies he told—and such lies were frequent with him—he told in order to screen his young masters from the anger of their father ; and their father's anger being just as frequently unreasonable as the reverse, honest Bruce experienced no qualm of conscience in trying by any process to circumvent it.

Bruce saw his young masters set off to Eton

with infinite regret, because he was not allowed to go with them. When, in process of time, they removed to Christ-Church, he was made very happy by being appointed to wait upon the elder of the two ; and of course, though distinctly charged to do nothing of the sort, did not hesitate to take the younger brother also under his own care. For then, even more than now, the line was drawn very sharp between the heir to a peerage with a large estate, and a younger brother with a younger brother's prospects. Bruce found at college that the young men were very much what they had been as boys at Baddlesmere. Both were clever—both, up to a certain point, industrious ; and they were much attached to one another. But the younger was still straightforward, upright, and, on principle, self-denying ; the elder, much the reverse of these things, especially in the matter of self-indulgence. Whatever caprice took him, that he indulged ; and his caprices would not always stand the test of moral scrutiny. By-and-by came the time when, having completed their academical career, it was

judged expedient that they should make the grand tour, — that indispensable climax, among the wealthier nobility and gentry of a bygone generation, to the proper training of youth ; and here, again, Bruce was constrained to submit to a separation. They were to travel with their tutor—a clergyman of the Church of England—who, having made the tour already, declared that English servants were nuisances abroad, and who undertook to provide for them a French attendant, himself being content to be his own valet. They went, and were absent somewhere about a year and a half, when a sudden summons, occasioned, as was said, by the alarming illness of their mother, recalled them. They came back, having parted from their tutor in London ; and Bruce, who took more note of their sayings and doings than any other individual connected with the family, saw in a moment that they were changed men. The strong affection which, in spite of great contrariety of character, used to knit them together, had given place to something not far removed from its opposite. Perhaps the

feeling of bitterness was more strongly marked in the younger than in the elder. But a dark cloud had passed between them. They walked apart.

Lady Belmore died, and her sons followed her, side by side, to the grave. They stood over the vault while the funeral service was read ; looked down upon the gorgeous coffin as it was shunted into its proper niche, and returned to the Hall, there to separate. They met again at dinner, when their father announced to them that for his elder son he had purchased a commission in the Guards ; that the younger was to take orders ; and, as soon as he became of the proper age, would succeed to a family living which was about to become vacant in Devonshire. From infancy the brothers had never been accustomed to question the will of their father once he declared it. To the military career chalked out for him, the elder of the two expressed no objection. On the contrary, had the choice been submitted to him, he would have selected this mode of passing the time till, in the course of nature, the family coronet should settle on his brows. The younger

was not quite so well pleased. He had set his heart, before going abroad, on Parliamentary distinction, to which he conceived that the study of the law might contribute. But old aspirations, like the old brotherly love, seemed to have become weak within him, and though he did throw out a hint of his own unfitness for the office of a clergyman, he abstained from pressing the objection: indeed it would have been perfectly useless to do so. A word once spoken by my lord his father was never recalled, so Sydney looked his future destiny bravely in the face, and accepted it as inevitable.

In due time Sydney was ordained, was presented by his father to the valuable rectory of St Botolphs, and went away to take possession. Francis went to join his regiment in London, carrying Bruce, much to the delight of that trustworthy person, with him. It was a time of immense excitement there and elsewhere. The French Revolution had broken out, and men watched the progress of events with a degree of interest proportionate to their importance.

At first, what was regarded as the attempt of an oppressed people to assert their liberties, commanded the sympathy of all generous minds. These might regret the means which were from time to time applied to achieve a great end ; but the end itself was so high, so every way praiseworthy, that the most fastidious could not but make large allowance even for the excesses which they deplored. But when, by - and - by, tidings came of the burning of chateaux, the sack of cities, the shedding of innocent blood like water, and the fearful orgies which made the dens of Paris hideous, a strong revulsion of feeling took place, and all except a few enthusiasts, and a good many designing democrats, pronounced against the movement. At last the judicial murder of the unfortunate king and queen put the finishing touch to that panorama of horrors. Continental Europe armed in order to stem a tide which threatened to overwhelm her ; and England, long incredulous that she also would find it necessary to take part in the fray, armed also. It was at this critical juncture, when Pitt still talked of peace, and was

proposing that commercial treaty with France to which he looked as the best means of cementing the bond of union between the two countries, that the eldest son of Charles Lord Belmore became an officer in his Majesty's Guards, and found himself thrown, in his twenty-fifth year, into the dissipations of a London life, which, if sometimes coarser (they could hardly be more barefaced) than they are in the present day, were not one whit more destructive of all that is really generous in man's nature.

Happily for himself, in some respects at least, Captain Harris had no taste for coarse living. The cockpit, the ring, the deep carouse, had no charms for him. To play, provided it were in moderation, he did not object; but from chicken-hazard and loaded dice, and the men and women who delighted in them, he turned away. At first, indeed, he seemed indisposed to meet, except coldly, the advances that were made to him, and these were many. The eldest son of a peer, who, though eccentric, was believed to be enormously rich, could not fail to be welcome in

every *salon*; and mothers who cast their flies to win him for their daughters, declared that he was all the more desirable that he came among them, whether early or late, master of himself. But Captain Harris declined to take the bait. He was more intent by far on cultivating his own mind—at least the world said so—than in trying to please others. By-and-by he was returned to Parliament for one of the three boroughs of which his noble father was the proprietor; and, to do him justice, he made one or two very creditable advances to give strength to his party. But even in this direction he never went farther than to create the conviction that if he chose to exert himself he might aspire to become one of the leaders of the Opposition. It was under these circumstances that he made the acquaintance of one who was regarded, if not as the first, certainly among the first of the leaders of *ton*. Lady Franklin, the young and beautiful wife of Sir George Franklin, was the reigning toast of the day—the admired of all admirers. Her husband, twenty years at least older than herself,

was supposed to treat her with marked neglect. He, too, had a seat in the House of Commons, where he supported the Minister; but that circumstance did not interfere with his private friendships, which were all of the loosest kind. Lady Franklin encountered Captain Harris, and determined to subdue him. She began operations, at least so she alleged, seeking no more than to bring him to her feet, as she had already brought half the men, married and unmarried, about town. But his coldness—for at first he was cold, wellnigh to freezing—only roused her to fresh exertions, and, seeking to make him her slave, she ended in becoming his. The issues have already been hinted at. His vanity was flattered. By degrees he began to take an interest in her; excited and warmed, he spoke of love while leading her down the country-dance, and found her ready to surrender on the first summons. Bruce did not know what to make of it when his master desired him one morning to have a post-chaise and four waiting against an hour named at the bottom of Park Lane. The

same evening at eight o'clock he found it all out, however, when Captain Harris, supporting a lady on his arm, and carrying a small valise, or, as it would now be called, a bag, made his appearance. The chaise-door was opened, the steps let down, and the elopement was effected without any interruption.

Bruce, as in after-life he often said, was "quite taken aback." He had known his master do many foolish things, but none so bad as this. Still the Captain was his master, and grieving over and blaming him, but blaming a thousandfold more the partner of his flight, he continued to serve him with all the fidelity which had characterised his previous career. Captain Harris fully appreciated the devotion of his follower. He did not find it very easy, when the divorce had been procured, and the ceremonial of a marriage gone through, as after the demise of the old lord it was, to reconcile Bruce to the new state of things. But that excellent person put constraint upon his antipathies. He kept his place, and rose to be what he now was—head of the establishment below-stairs.

A word or two more of recapitulation, and

then we go forward with our narrative. His son's escapade can hardly be said to have given the old Lord Belmore any serious annoyance. He would have been terribly put out had his own wife left him when both were young. But breaches of the marriage-vow elsewhere than at home were then too common to be very gravely censured, if indeed the gallant who stole his Helena from Menelaus were not thought the better of for the performance. Of course Lord Belmore never counted on his son marrying the woman with whom he had eloped : that was quite out of the question. And though the damages laid were heavy, he cared little about that, because his son could pay them without making any severe inroad upon his patrimony. But had it been possible for him to look into that village church, where "I, Francis, took thee, Augusta, for my wedded wife," we verily believe that he would have risen from the grave to forbid the contract. He saw not the proceedings, however, for he had been dead just four weeks. And so his son and heir became with the *ci-devant* Lady Franklin one flesh.

CHAPTER X.

INTO THE COUNTRY.

"I AM going to Baddlesmere, Bruce, and doubt whether I shall ever come back here again. I certainly shan't for a long time to come. You must arrange the household accordingly; but don't hurry or distress Lady Belmore. Last night I desired her to follow with the boys to-morrow or next day. But that wouldn't give her time to settle her own affairs. So I will write a note and leave it for her. You will do exactly as she wishes."

Bruce was touched by the tone of apparent despondency in which these sentences were uttered, and using the privilege of an old and tried servant, ventured to say,—

"But surely, my lord, you won't think of living all alone down at that place? You could not bear it long, and my lady, your lordship knows, will mope to death there."

"I hope not, Bruce. I don't want to annoy her, and therefore it is that I wish you to take your directions from her. I will do very well there by myself for a while."

"Your lordship is not well. I've noticed for some time back that you weren't the thing. Would you not put off your journey, and see Dr Sumner before you go?"

"No, Bruce, I must set off to-day. You'll follow when it is quite convenient for my lady, but not before."

The house-steward knew his place too well to continue the conversation further, and withdrew; whereupon Lord Belmore seated himself before a writing-table, and wrote as follows:—

"MY DEAR AUGUSTA,—I fear that I was very rude, and, worse than rude, unkind and ungenerous to you last night. Pray forgive me. You

saw that I was not master of myself. That cursed attack in the theatre, and the wine that I took to keep me up to the mark at Evans's, stole away my brains. As I have no chance of seeing you before I start, I write merely to say, don't consider yourself bound to follow me till it shall be quite convenient to yourself. I shall have a great deal to do for a while at Baddlesmere—for somehow or another my pecuniary affairs have got into confusion—so you must not think of me as moping all alone. Of course it will be a great pleasure to me when you and the boys join me. But let that be just when it suits you, not one hour sooner or later. By the by, it appears to me high time that the boys should go to school, and I will arrange to board them with the brother of my old tutor, who has just succeeded to an under-mastership at Eton. I will get Brackenbury over to stay with me and settle all the details, so that you may carry them to Eton before you come down.

“Make my apologies to our friends this evening, if indeed they should miss me, having the benefit

of your society : and believe me, now, as ever,
your affectionate BELMORE.

“*P.S.*—I have told Bruce to take his orders from you. My wants while I am a bachelor will be very few. You will need a full establishment as long as you remain in town, and I beg of you not to hesitate in using it freely.”

Leaving this letter on the breakfast-table, carefully sealed and addressed, Lord Belmore stepped out into the hall. The sunlight was shining into it, for the morning broke clear and calm, and through the open door wood and lawn looked in perfect winter's beauty, the rime glittering like a shower of diamonds on the boughs, and the snow lying smooth and hard upon the ground. Bruce and his own man were there to help him on, first with an overcoat, richly mounted in silk and velvet, and then with a wrapper well lined with fur.

“Your pistols are in the pockets of the chariot, my lord,” said his valet, observing that his master,

after feeling about the wrapper, looked towards one of the tables. "I loaded them myself and put them there."

"And your own, Fleming—have you got them?"

"Yes, my lord, here they are," showing at the same time the brass-mounted butt of a horse-pistol protruding from each of the pockets of a thick greatcoat.

"Then we're all ready, I suppose?"

"Yes, my lord, if your lordship is."

His lordship was ready. He walked towards the entrance, and was already on the upper step of the stairs beyond it when the voice of Lady Belmore, calling him by his name, caused him to look round.

"Augusta, my dear, why did you disturb yourself? This is not right. You were up very late last night; you ought to have lain still."

"I could not let you go without saying good-bye," she replied, with difficulty restraining her emotion in the presence of the servants; "and I wanted to tell you myself that we should all set out

to-morrow to join you. Bruce will be quite able to get everything in order, I am sure; and if not, he can stay behind and settle up odds and ends."

"No, no, dear, nothing of the sort! I had left a note for you, not expecting to see you, and you'll find it on the breakfast-table. Don't come till it is quite convenient to yourself. Indeed I'd rather be without you for a little while," he added, with a smile. Seeing that she looked sad and vexed at this declaration,—“I shall be up to my ears in accounts for a good fortnight to come, and am much more likely to get them right if left entirely to myself. Good-bye, love—good bye! I've told you about the boys too, and I think you'll quite approve the arrangement."

He held out his arms to receive her, and she fell into them, kissing him passionately. Her cheeks were wet with tears when she withdrew from that embrace, and a thick cloud obscured his vision. And so they parted: she returning to her room and to her bed—not to sleep, but to think thoughts far from bright, indeed, but less bitter than those which had filled her mind over-

night ; and he to hurry off in the direction of Baddlesmere Park, in Hampshire, as fast as four post-horses could carry him.

Lord Belmore was provided, as gentlemen travelling in those days used to be, against the attacks of highwaymen. So was his servant, who sat upon the rumble behind ; but on the present occasion there was no need to appeal to the weapons. Whether the severity of the weather had an effect in keeping them away, or that some recent failures—and such had occurred—operated to deter them, the deponent saith not ; but Lord Belmore performed his cold and tedious journey without encountering any of the knights of the road. It was not, however, performed in one day. Sixty miles of road, of such roads as intersected England before the era of Macadam, put too great a strain upon horse-flesh to be run over between the morning and the evening of a winter's day, even though, as on the present occasion, a long-continued frost had done a good deal to improve them. Besides, it was Sunday ; and whether occupied by their religious duties or not,

the hostlers about posting-houses removed a few stages out of London generally made themselves scarce that day, except on the way to Newmarket, and about the period of the great meets there. Lord Belmore experienced the inconvenience of this more than once. And more than once the sound of "the church-going bell," with the sight of people streaming into or out of the village temples as he passed them by, had a solemnising, perhaps a reproachful, effect upon him. Lord Belmore was not a religious man—he never pretended to be; yet to-day strange thoughts came over him. He leaned back in his carriage, and gave a free rein—almost a willing course—to speculations which had never before taken with him the shape which they then did. "Is there a state of existence for us beyond the grave? and if there be, shall its conditions be determined by anything that we do, or think, or say, in our present state of being? All these people evidently believe so. And they gather together in one place to offer up prayer to the Supreme Being, satisfied that their prayers will be heard and answered. Is

this reasonable? I don't know. The order of the universe seems to be settled by laws that never vary; and these we call the laws of nature. Ay, but what is nature? what are laws? Laws imply that there shall be an intelligent law-giver. Nature is a mere word, an expression that denotes nothing. I understand, or persuade myself that I understand, what is called the ebb and flow of tides, the growth and decay of animal and vegetable substances, because these processes go on before my eyes, and are continual. But what lies at the root of them? And those mysterious words—oh! those mysterious words—how they haunt my memory! how they speak to my imagination! how they awaken within me almost the hope that all is not what we see and hear—that there may be a land where brighter, sweeter, starrier visions shall be awarded to us than the brightest that meet us here! I wish that I were as one of these poor people. I wish that I were not what I am. Vain thought! idle word! We are what destiny has made us. Ah me! ah me! how justly argued the sage—how

wise the conclusion to which he leads us up !
' *Effugere, enim, nemo id potest, quod futurum est. Sæpe autem, ne utile quidem est, scire, quid futurum sit. Miserum est, enim, nihil proficientem auge, nec habere ne spei, quidem, extremum, et tamen commune solatium ; præsertim cum vos iidem fato fieri dicatis omnia ; quod autem semper ex omni eternitate fuerit id esse fatum.*' "

Lord Belmore made forty miles between nine in the morning and five o'clock in the afternoon of that Sunday. He put up at one of those comfortable wayside inns—standing on the skirt of a considerable village—of which the shells may still be seen here and there in most of our counties, though their occupation is gone. What pleasant halting-places they were, with their tidy parlours, their chambers scrupulously clean, their well-aired beds, their damask household linen, their bright silver flagons and brighter glasses, their attentive hostesses and most obsequious landlords ! With what perfect satisfaction the traveller alighted in the courtyard, and, preceded by mine host bareheaded—and if there

were ladies in his train, by mine hostess also—walked leisurely through the passage, up the first flight of steps, and so onwards to his apartments! How gratefully, if it were summer-time, streamed the mild rays of the setting sun through his window! how cheering, if he came in winter, was the roaring fire in the grate! And then the dinner!—the ox-tail soup, the eels purified from all flavour of mud by some six-and-thirty hours' prolongation of their existence in pure water, the five-year-old mutton, the cherry-tart — how excellent all these were! their natural flavour heightened by that best of all sauces, hunger. How much to the purpose, too, the style in which the first dish was placed upon the table by mine host, and how agreeable and trustworthy his recommendation of his madeira that had made the voyage to India and back, or his port in magnums, or possibly his claret! Φευ, φευ, these are all things of the past, never to be seen again in this our England—no more our merry, but our busy and ever - restless England. Well, what must be, must. We cannot have our cake and

eat our cake. The road has given place to the rail, as the rail will doubtless do by-and-by to the balloon, or the wings, or possibly the tube ; till time and space come as near to the condition that makes true lovers happy as the requirements of a state of material existence will allow.

Lord Belmore was no stranger at the sign of the Green Dragon, at which, ever since the days of posting began, he and his forefathers, in their journeys to and from the metropolis, had been in the habit of changing horses. His reception was therefore as cordial and obsequious as landlord and landlady could make it ; but though well received,—Lord Belmore could not be wantonly rude to any one,—these kindly greetings made no deep impression upon him. He allowed dinner to be served with the accustomed ceremonial, and a bottle of madeira to be put down for warmth before the fire ; but he ate as men do who have no appetite, and made sparing use of the wine. He kept it by him, however, after ordering writing materials to be brought, and sat down to write. He wrote thus :—

"DEAR BRACKENBURY,—I am in great trouble, and, what is more, in great grief. If I stood alone in the world, I should know what my course ought to be, and would follow it. But, considering that other interests are concerned than my own, it seems to me impossible to choose the right without creating a far larger amount of mischief than by choosing the wrong. I want to see and take counsel with you at your earliest convenience. To-morrow I shall be at Baddlesmere, and hope to be alone there for one day at least. Come over on Tuesday, and bring your night-gear with you. I have much to tell you, and much to ask of you. Don't fail.—Yours sincerely,
BELMORE."

This letter, addressed to the Rev. Thomas Brackenbury, Slope Rectory, near Updown, and franked, Lord Belmore desired his man to carry to the post-office. He then tried to read, having brought with him, as it was his invariable custom to do when travelling, a few books. But he soon found that when some grave reality fills

the mind, no strain upon the will is strong enough to make it take any interest in matters apart from that reality. He closed his volume, walked to and fro about the room, returned to the bottle of madeira, and by degrees consumed it all. It seemed to have scarcely more effect upon him than if it had been so much water, except that it contributed to bring on that disposition to sleep which overmasters all care and even anguish, whether of mind or body, when the frame is exhausted. He rang for a bedroom-candle, and having given directions that breakfast should be ready at an early hour next morning, he went to bed.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ARTIST.

WE return to M. de Couvré and Mrs Todd, whom we left making their way on foot through the streets after the occurrence of the incidents that befell them in Drury Lane Theatre. They walked in silence, and more slowly than seemed to be agreeable to Mrs Todd ; for she stepped out briskly from time to time, and was restrained from persevering at that rate only by the inability of her companion to keep pace with her. At last they reached No. 39 St Ann Street, and the lady let herself in.

“ You will stop with me, Mr Discover, and take a cup of tea before you go to bed. And you'll lie still in the morning. You have taken

too much out of yourself to-day. You need rest."

"No, thank you, good Madame Todd; I will not take tea. I will go to bed and sleep if I can, and as long as I can. But I must be up in time and go about my search to-morrow. God help me!—God help me!"

"Don't do anything of the kind. You have searched long enough and found nothing. Leave that to me now. You take rest particular to-morrow, for it's Sunday; and our theatres, nor our police-offices, aint open o' Sundays."

"Ah! true—so it is; but I will go to one of your churches. Who knows?—she may be there."

"Not a bit of her. Ladies as does as she has done don't go to church. Besides, Mr Discover, she aint of our religion—be she?"

"True again—true again. Well, I suppose I must be content to walk the streets and keep my eyes open."

"I wish you would be content to keep them shut. A good long dose of sleep would be meat

and drink to you. Won't you really have a cup of tea?"

"No, thank you, good Madame Todd."

She gave him a candle, with which he made his way up-stairs to his apartment. Even he could not help observing the wonderful change that had been made in it since the morning. The cobwebs were swept from the walls and the ceiling; a carpet, not new certainly, but not in rags, covered the greater part of the floor; the chairs were ranged round the wall, and an arm-chair, well stuffed and padded, stood on one side of the fireplace, where a cheerful fire was burning. Engrossed as his mind was with his own great trouble, the old man felt moved by such evident tokens of his landlady's desire to make him comfortable. He seated himself in the arm-chair, drew out the precious miniature from his side pocket, gazed upon it with an earnest gaze, and then knelt down and prayed. He prayed with the miniature in his hand—not to it, but for the person whom it represented. What he sought, or to whom he appealed—if to any

mediator between him and the Supreme—we cannot undertake to say. But the exercise appeared to have a soothing effect upon him. He rose from his knees, unlocked the great trunk, kissed the miniature, and replaced it carefully between the folds of the silk shawl. This done, he locked the trunk again, and went to bed.

Meanwhile Mrs Todd, who really was a sort of mother to all her lodgers, having noticed that the lights were still burning in the apartments of her first-floor, knocked at his door, and being desired to come in, entered. She found him wrapped in a magnificent figured-silk dressing-gown, sitting with his feet on the fender and reading. Behind him was a deal board propped upon tressels, which he had drawn close that he might lean his elbow on it, and over which were scattered drawing materials—pencils, brushes, chalks, and boxes of colours. Round the walls were hung a number of sketches, some in crayons, some in water-colours—studies of heads, of animals, of groups, of landscapes, with figures intermixed, and ancient temples in ruins. With the

exception of the disposition of these things round the walls, the apartment, though wellnigh elegantly furnished, was certainly not in a state which housewives would describe as tidy. All the side tables and both the sofas were littered with well-bound books. An easel stood here and a palette there. In short, it was, to the most minute detail, the living-room of one who lived and breathed continually when alone in an atmosphere of art. And well it might be, because Mrs Todd's first-floor, *alias* Mr Thomas Hogarth, had already, though very young, made his footing sure in the great arena of life. He came to town an unknown youth of twenty or thereabouts, where the generosity of comparative strangers enabled him to prosecute his studies; and so well had he spent his time, and so diligently improved the opportunities afforded him, that now, at the age of six-and-twenty, all London rang with his praises. His studio, which lay beyond the apartment wherein we are now making our first acquaintance with him, could show several portraits at various stages of com-

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pletion, as well of ladies as of gentlemen ; and the lighter pieces which adorned the drawing-room were, with one or two exceptions, the sketches or rough materials, out of which he proposed, when leisure from portrait-painting would allow, to execute such works as would send down his name to posterity in no unworthy companionship with those of Claude, of Titian, and even of Raphael. Mr Thomas Hogarth was indeed an enthusiast in his profession. His friends and admirers pronounced him to be more,—they said he was a genius of the highest order.

“How be your cold, Mr Hogarth ? I hope you’ll allow me to make you a posset, and that you’ll take it hot when you get into bed.”

“Thank you, Mrs Todd ; my cold will be all right in the morning. I hope you had a pleasant evening at the theatre. But what brings you home so soon ?”

“Why then, sir, it’s just about that same that I’d like to talk to you a bit, if only you was quite well and at leisure to listen to me.”

“Never was more at leisure in my life, Mrs

Todd. Come, take a seat there," handing a chair for her opposite to himself, and turning so as to face her. "I am quite ready to hear your adventures—what were they?"

"It's a long story, sir; but I must tell it from beginning to end, otherwise you won't be able to make head or tail of what I may call the last scene in the play."

"Go on—go on; I'm all attention."

"Well, then, you must know that three or four years ago, when them poor French people as was driven out of their own country by the Jacobins began to swarm thick into London, there came to me along with a gentleman—a clergyman of the Church, too, that once lodged here—a gentleman and a lady, both of them foreigners, that wanted to hire the rooms you now occupy. The clergyman who brought them had always paid his rent punctual, and was an honourable gentleman—leastwise I know'd no other—and on his recommendation I let them the first floor. The foreign gentleman was that same poor Mr Discover whom you kindly lent your glass coach

to to carry him to Drury Lane to-night, and the lady was as beautiful a creature—though she might be, I daresay, well on to five-and-twenty or more—as your eyes ever looked upon. Why, the old gentleman—I calls him old, though I don't think he is much over fifty, or mayhap fifty-five—has got a picture of her, taken, as he tells me, when she was quite young, and it's really the most beautiful thing that eyes ever looked upon. I think you should get him to show it to you, for more reasons nor one; and that if he would let you take a copy of it it might be of use both to him and to you. Well, Mr Discover and his niece—for she was his niece, or he said she was—gave very little trouble, and saw no company except the gentleman as brought them here, once or twice, and another Frenchman, a priest—an abbey I think they call him—who comes still at odd times to visit the old man in his affliction. But by-and-by their money, poor people! began to run short, and they were talking of going away and seeking cheaper lodgings, when Mr Thornly, him as is or was the mana-

ger, or lessee, or I don't know what, of the Globe Theatre, called on them, in company with the clergyman, their referee. I must tell you that the lady sang like an angel. I never did hear such a voice. The first time she practised it I happened to be passing the drawing-room door, and if you had threatened to take my life I couldn't have gone away from listening to her. Every time she sang I declare there was quite a commotion in the house ; and if she sang, as she often did in summer, with the window open, a crowd gathered below to listen. Well, to make a long story short, Mr Thornly came and heard her sing, and forthwith nothing would content him but that she should try her hand at one of his operas on the stage. I wasn't there the night of her first trial, though I used often to get free admissions from her afterwards, but she told me with great glee that she carried the whole audience with her. It was a settled thing. She took an engagement under Mr Thornly, and for the whole of that season, and for some seasons after, she was all the rage. The old man

kept the lodgings on. He went with her every night she acted, and brought her back again. I don't think the lady was happy all this while. I have often seen her weeping when I went in upon her suddenly, and there was an anxious look about her, as if she was always expecting something to happen that didn't happen, or some one to appear that didn't appear. But she stuck to her work like a brave, good woman, as I believed her to be, and the two were able to live as well as gentlefolks need do.

“It's just about a year ago, or maybe a month or two less, that one day—I shall never forget it as long as I live—just after Mr Discover had gone out to pay a visit to his friend the Abbé, who was ill, a ring came to the door, and a tall, good-looking gentleman, with sandy hair and whiskers, asked of me—for I answered the bell myself,—whether Mounseer and Mamselle Discover was at home? I told him, as was true, that Mr Discover had just gone out, but that Miss was at home, and that if he wished to see her and would give me his card I would take it up. He

said there was no need to send up his card. He was a very old friend of theirs, had known them in their own country, and would rather take them by surprise. Well, I didn't suspect anything wrong, and showed him into the drawing-room where Mamselle was not, for she had gone into the bedroom to change her dress. Of course I left him there, and of course Mamselle came down in good time and met him. What passed, I don't know, only I heard a sort of scream ; but as it wasn't repeated, nor any pull given to the bell, I took no notice. The gentleman stayed a good half-hour ; and after he went away Mamselle seemed to be quite another creature. She was in the seventh heaven. She couldn't settle to anything till Mr Discover came back ; and then, with a power that has often astonished me when I look back upon it, she recovered her old manner as if nothing out of the common had happened. I don't believe she ever told Mr Discover that the stranger had called upon her. I am sure she so arranged that he never called again, except when Mr Discover was abroad ; and often and often

she used to do what I had never known her do ever since she came—she would go out alone, and be absent one or two hours at a time. Mr Discover didn't quite like this, and remonstrated with her, quietly, as was his custom, but she persuaded him, with her winning ways, not to forbid it ; and, saying always that she was going to rehearsal, took her own way.

“ Ah, sir, you seem by that smile to guess in what all this ended. About five months ago she went out and never returned. She left upon the table a letter, in some foreign tongue, addressed to Mr Discover ; and the old man, when he read it, as he did in my presence, dropped down upon the floor like as if he had been shot. She left all her clothing too—leastwise I suppose so, because there the trunk stands beside the old man's fireplace up-stairs, which contained them when she came ; and carefully and religiously the poor gentleman keeps it always locked. Oh me ! oh me ! she never came back. He sought for her far and near, and so did I. Every morning he said, ‘ She'll surely come to-day.’ Every evening

it was always this :—‘ She’ll be here to-morrow, Mrs Todd—she’ll be here to-morrow.’ But the day and the morrow that were to bring her never came. At last he took to trying it on with the Bow Street runners, and all that came of that was that they plundered him and did nothing. Yes, they did though ; they advised him yesterday to look for her in the theatres, and to begin with Drury Lane. Well, we went there, for I couldn’t let the poor man go alone, and what do you think we saw ? ”

“ The young lady in the third tier, or in one of the saloons.”

“ No. But either the gentleman as visited her and spirited her away, or somebody as like to him as one pea is to another. And now I want you to help me to find out who he is, what he is, and what he has done with Mamselle.”

“ Well, my dear Mrs Todd, you are the most benevolent of women, and I am very much flattered by the opinion which you seem to entertain of my perspicacity and social influence ; but unless you can give me a better clue for my guid-

ance than the information that this naughty Lothario is a tall, good-looking man, with sandy hair, I am afraid that I shall be of very little use to you. Did you see him in the theatre?"

"Yes."

"Was the girl with him, or near him?"

"No, no! if she had been there, Mr Discover himself would have noticed her."

"Well, where was he sitting—in the pit or in the boxes?"

"In one of the boxes, close to the stage, on the left hand as you look from the pit to the drop-scene."

"Was he alone?"

"No. There was two ladies and three gentlemen with him; and they all left the house as soon as the first piece was over."

"Why did you not make your way into the dress circle, and challenge him on the spot."

"Well, I tried to; but I forgot to get a pass coming out of the pit, and the checktaker wouldn't

let us through to the boxes without paying, and I had no money."

"Is that all?"

"No, not quite. We took our station at the foot of the grand staircase, and I saw him again. But a crowd broke in between us, and he went off with one of the ladies in a carriage before I could speak to him."

"Well, Mrs Todd, you've told me a remarkable story. I must make the poor old man's personal acquaintance; and if he will show me the miniature, and give me a little more information to help me in the search, I'll do my best to find his lost sheep for him. And yet, Mrs Todd, I'm inclined to think that it would be better to leave her where she is. She can never be a comfort to him again."

"So I've more than once taken it upon me to insinuate. But he don't think so, poor gentleman; and to reason him out of what his heart's set on would be impossible."

"Very well, Mrs Todd, we'll see what can be done." And so they parted.

Mr Hogarth thought a good deal over his landlady's story, both before he went to sleep and when he woke again ; and the issue at which he arrived amounted to this, that the chances were at least as ninety-nine to a hundred against his being able, in any way, to be of service to M. de Couvré. "Even if I were to find out who the seducer is—that's the proper word, I suppose—what business would it be of mine to expose him ? And what gain would it bring to this poor Frenchman to discover where his niece is, unless she were willing to come back to him ? We don't live in an age and country where it is possible to keep ladies mewed up in enchanted castles. If her situation were otherwise than agreeable to herself, she would change it of her own accord. On the whole, then, would it not be judicious in me to keep clear of the matter altogether ? Hang it ! I wish Mrs Todd hadn't made me her confidant, and enlisted my sympathies in the old man's favour. Well, I suppose I must go so far at all events as to have a talk with him, and to see this beautiful portrait, if he think fit to show it.

As to copying it, what good would come of that? Stop; some good might come. Yes, yes, it might. I'll copy it if the old gentleman will allow me."

Having arrived at this conclusion, his next step was to ring the bell, as he sat at breakfast, and to desire that Mrs Todd would come to him. She came, and the subject which they had discussed overnight was at once renewed.

"But will M. de Couvré care to see me at all, and to accept my acquaintance? And if he do, is he likely to discuss with me, a perfect stranger, an affair so delicate as this of his niece?"

"Discuss with you? Lord love you, Mr Hogarth, he can't think or speak of anything else! He'd discuss it with the watchman as passes the door, if the watchman would stop to listen to him. I'll go up and tell him that you have taken quite a fancy to him, and that you've so many friends all over London that you're the likeliest person I know of to find out all that he wants to discover. He'll not wait for you to call upon him. He'll be here to call upon you in a minute."

Mrs Todd judged correctly. Mr Hogarth was sipping his last cup of tea, when his landlady, who had carried her plan into prompt execution, returned with M. de Couvré, got up in his best attire.

"This is Mr Hogarth, sir ; and, Mr Hogarth, this is Mr Discover. Now I'll leave you to have your talk, while I get ready for church."

Their talk was such as the landlady foretold that it would be. Not only was there no reticence on the part of the poor emigrant, but, perceiving that his new friend took a real interest in the case, he agreed at once to let Mr Hogarth see the miniature. He hurried upstairs, and soon returned with the precious case in his hand. Mr Hogarth was struck, as he well might be, with the exquisite beauty of the countenance. He admired the execution of the portrait, also, as a work of art, and ventured to propose making a copy. But from that proposal the Frenchman shrank with undisguised horror.

"Pray don't mistake my motive, M. de Couvré," said the artist ; "I should like to make the

copy on a small scale, so that I might carry it about with me, and, by showing it to my friends, get as many of them as possible to help us in looking for the original. I don't mean to make any capital out of it, believe me."

"Carry it about with you! show it to your friends! no, no, Mr Hogarth, I would not have the portrait of my darling so profaned—no, not for the universe. I have shown it to you because you seem to take an interest in her story, and you will bear the similitude in your own mind wherever you go, because it is a face once seen never to be forgotten. But to make it common property, like the faces of actors and actresses, which we see in shop windows, the bare thought distresses—the act would kill me."

"Well, well, my dear sir, don't distress yourself on that head. I'll do what I can to trace her. But you must bear in mind that my talents are not those of a detective, and that London is a very big place. Meanwhile would it suit you to read French and Italian with me three hours in the week? for I find myself very rusty in both,

and both are useful to me in my profession. Your own terms are mine ; pray state them without hesitation."

M. de Couvré gave a little start, as if abruptly recalled by the proposal to the realities of life and their requirements. He soon recovered his self-possession, however, and expressed his readiness to become tutor in both languages to his fellow-lodger.

" But I have an engagement at Belmore House every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, where I read French with my lord's two sons. Any hour that may suit you on the other days of the week you may command."

It was accordingly arranged that on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in every week, M. de Couvré should spend the first hour after breakfast, whatever that hour happened to be, in teaching the young painter how to master the intricacies of the French and Italian languages, the painter being with difficulty persuaded to accede to terms so moderate as five shillings a-lesson.

CHAPTER XII.

A BRILLIANT DINNER.

LADY BELMORE rose and dressed a little before noon, on the day when her husband left her. She had read his letter, and wept over it in bed. She put it into her bosom now, after dismissing Louise, and descended to the breakfast-room, whither Bruce repaired also, to receive her instructions. They were not exactly such as she proposed to make them during her parting interview with Lord Belmore ; but they appeared to give entire satisfaction to the house-steward. His lordship had desired to be left undisturbed at Baddlesmere a few days. She would not go down to-morrow, therefore, nor next day, but Bruce might begin packing whenever he pleased,

only bearing in mind that there was a small dinner to-day and a larger on Wednesday. She would be glad to see Mr Thompson also, and to make arrangements with him about the young gentlemen.

“ Was he at home ? ”

“ No, he was not at home ; he had gone to church with his pupils.”

“ Oh, very true ; we’ll meet at luncheon.”

They did meet at luncheon, and Mr Thompson was told that his charges would be separated from him. They were going to Eton. Their father had settled it, and it was not proposed to continue Mr Thompson’s superintendence of their studies there. Lady Belmore, who was in the best possible humour, dealt out this unpleasant intelligence as little offensively as might be. She even waited till her sons had left the room before giving their tutor his *congé*, and announced the fact to himself as if it pained her to do so. The pain, or the appearance of it, might be assumed by her ; it was a reality to the individual who received the communication. For it threw him,

so to speak, upon the world, he being as yet, though a graduate, too young to take orders, and without any other profession. He looked, as he felt, terribly put out, and she understood him.

"Of course, Mr Thompson, my lord is your debtor for a half-year's salary, and we shall both be glad to serve you in any other way that we can. Won't you be ordained somewhere about Lady-day next?"

"Yes, my lady, if I can find a title," replied the tutor, partially relieved by the assurance of a hundred pounds down.

"Well, look about you for one, and if you can't find an opening elsewhere, write to Lord Belmore or to me at Baddlesmere, and we'll try to find a curacy for you in that neighbourhood."

"Is your ladyship going to Baddlesmere, then?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Because I thought you very much disliked the place. So at least the boys have told me."

"My likings and dislikings are nothing to you,

Mr Thompson," replied the lady, bristling up ; "and the boys might have been better employed than in talking to you about them. You will remain here till your pupils go to school, which will probably be Monday or Tuesday next week."

So saying she bowed the tutor out of the room, all her consideration for his feelings having evaporated the moment he trenched in ever so slight a degree upon her own. Great ladies are sometimes inconsiderate enough even when their characters are sound. If a crack happen to have got into them, they are usually sensitive of the most remote approach to undue familiarity, and in their dealings with dependants and servants, almost always exacting and arrogant. Lady Belmore could not tolerate that a person in Mr Thompson's position should presume to have any opinion at all as to what her predilections might or might not be.

The evening had closed in, and the living-rooms and hall in Belmore House were lighted up when the guests expected at dinner that day began one after another to arrive. They con-

sisted of the same three poets and the same authoress who had shared her ladyship's box on the preceding evening, and of Mr Hogarth, the rising artist, whose acquaintance our readers made not long ago, and who, arriving rather late, was the last to be announced. It was clear from the manner of his reception that Mr Hogarth was a general favourite, and still more so from the set she made at him, that our authoress, the well-known Mrs O'Hagan, whose tales of Irish life were in everybody's hands, had determined to add him to the number of her satellites. For satellites the lady managed to get about her in large numbers, more, it must be confessed, because of a peculiar talent which belonged to her of being able to mix up subtle flattery to others with an enormous amount of self-appreciation, than through the possession either of personal charms, or of what is still more attractive than beauty, the faculty of conversing well. Let any man, for example, be he dull or brilliant, seat himself on a sofa between her and Lady Belmore, and his desire would naturally be to devote him-

self exclusively to the latter ; but he would not be ten minutes in his place before finding himself taken captive by the little woman on the other side, if she should think it worth while to angle for him, and constrained positively against his will to listen to her twaddle, and reply to it. So marvellous in society is the power of impudence and clap-trap, when the possessor of these invaluable qualities knows how to be wise and discriminating in the use of them.

A dinner of six must be a very bad dinner indeed if it fail to realise the reasonable expectations of reasonable people. When the *convives* are all gifted persons such as met together that day at Belmore House, it can hardly be other than a complete success. But wit at second-hand is rarely worth repeating ; and arguments which even philosophers indulge in at their social gatherings will not always bear to be set down word for word in print. Our readers must therefore bring their imaginations into play, and frame for themselves, as they best can, some notion of the smart things that were said, and of the mirth

created by them, within Lady Belmore's coterie that evening. But mirth, like the provocatives to it, if indulged too far, becomes fatiguing, and we are glad to escape from it into graver matters. So it was here. Lord Belmore's absence was, of course, a subject of regret. The acting of the *débutante* over-night was rehearsed, criticised, and commented upon. The general condition of the stage, and the proper place to be assigned to players among artists, were discussed, and judgments given on each topic which presented just so much of contrariety as to afford good practice to the ingenuity of one speaker after another in striving to reconcile them.

"What do you think of the O'Farrel, Mr Hogarth?" demanded Mrs O'Hagan. "Isn't she charming? You are possessed of a clearer insight into the characters and capabilities of people in general than anybody I know. You are a great painter, and no man can be great as a painter who is unable to read the soul as well as the frame which covers it. Don't you think that if my story of the girl of Macgillicuddy's Reeks were dramatised,

the O'Farrel would give us Kathleen to the life?"

"You flatter me immensely," replied the painter, "and my art perhaps still more. I haven't seen the lady yet, and am therefore unable to guess whether she would be likely to do justice to a character so graphically described as that of Kathleen. But, by the by, Lady Belmore, you are fond of the mysterious and the romantic, I know, and I have a very romantic and mysterious story to tell you, and it is connected with what you saw and heard last night too. Would you like to hear it?"

"By all means—by all means; a good tale of mystery is something like a new sense. Pray let's have it."

"And the curious thing is," continued the painter, "that my story has reference to a poor man, an *émigré*, who gives lessons in French, I believe, to your sons, Lady Belmore."

"What! to M. de Couvré? Oh! then pray tell the story—we are all attention."

"There is a woman in the case, as you may

suppose. M. de Couvré, it appears, has a beautiful niece, or a young lady whom he calls his niece, who seems to have accompanied him in his flight to this country, and who lived with him, I don't know how long, in the identical lodgings which I now occupy. About half a year ago this beautiful niece, who, by the by, had been a public singer at the Globe, eloped one fine day from her uncle. With whom she ran away nobody knows any more than it is known whither she betook herself. All that can be said on these heads is, that before bolting she wrote a letter to her respected relative, who found it on his table when he returned home, and that the worthy gentleman fell to the ground on reading it, as if he had been shot. I tell the tale, you will observe, exactly as it was told to me, and my authority is Mrs Todd, my excellent landlady.

“Well, according to Mrs Todd, there used to come about the house before all this happened a gentleman who timed his visits with wonderful exactness, so as to call invariably when the uncle was from home. My excellent landlady, putting

this and that together, has arrived at the conclusion that it was this unknown stranger who contrived to supersede the uncle in the affections of the niece, and that the runaways are now living cosily together somewhere best known to themselves."

"Is that all?" interposed Mrs O'Hagan. "Little affairs of this kind, especially when public singers are concerned, do occur now and then. I don't think your tale is quite so romantic or mysterious as you led us to expect."

"Stop a moment, I have not done yet. M. de Couvré has sought his lost treasure far and near ever since. He has spent all his money in trying to purchase from the Bow Street officers information, which they either can't or won't give him, and up to yesterday he could not trace her. But yesterday he did. Somebody advised him to look for her in the theatres.

"A most judicious recommendation," interposed our Death's-head poet; "if not on the stage, certainly on the third tier or in the saloon."

"Perhaps, perhaps. Well, he followed the ad-

vice, and my admirable Mrs Todd—whom heaven preserve so long as it shall be my destiny to make my domicile in No. 39 St Ann Street, Soho—insisted on going with him last night. She really is an angel in her way. She left me no option except to take her posset last night before I went to bed, and through the efficacy of that charm I am now here to tell my story. Curiously enough, too, they went in my place, for I was able to send them in the coach which a severe cold prevented me from making use of myself. Now comes the mystery. Mrs Todd saw a sight which induced her to drag her companion out of the theatre before the play came to an end. A tall, good-looking gentleman, with sandy hair and whiskers, she recognised as the gallant that used to visit the frail one on the sly, and the frail one herself, if I understood my informant aright, sat beside him. On the other hand, M. de Couvré himself—from whom, by the by, I got a capital lesson in Italian this morning—saw nothing of the kind. He allowed himself to be dragged out of the pit, and with his guide, counsellor, and friend mounted

guard at the bottom of the great staircase, in order to intercept the fugitives as they came out. But the *ruse* failed. A crowd came rushing by and interfered between them and the objects of their search, and all that they succeeded in doing was to see the handsome gentleman with sandy hair and whiskers hand the lady into a carriage and drive off. And now what do you think ? I have seen the miniature of the lady, and a more perfect countenance it has never been my fortune to behold ; and I have promised to look out for the original wherever I go, with a view to bringing her back to her broken-hearted relative. Is not this a tale of mystery and romance ?”

There was a general assent to the opinion, followed by numerous inquiries from all present, except Lady Belmore. Her countenance fell, and she spoke not a single word.

“ Was the lady beside him in the box ?” demanded Fraser, the Scotch poet.

“ I understood Mrs Todd to say so. And yet, when I asked M. de Couvré about the matter, he assured me that he saw nobody. It was all a

blind mystery to him his companion's eagerness and activity."

"Egad! I remember now," interposed the Death's-head. "I did see a man and woman standing in the pit who stared hard at us. Depend upon it, Lady Belmore, you are the beautiful niece, and Lord Belmore is the tall handsome gentleman, with sandy hair and whiskers."

"Lord Belmore may be the gentleman," replied Mr Hogarth, smiling, "but I can assure you that Lady Belmore is not the niece. Her ladyship is very fair, the mysterious absentee is a brunette of the richest hue."

"Are you quite sure as to the lady's presence at all?" asked Lady Belmore, looking keenly at Mr Hogarth.

"Not quite sure, certainly, for I am speaking at second-hand. But my impression is that Mrs Todd saw them both, though M. de Couvré saw neither."

The conversation upon this took another turn, and lost itself by-and-by in the drawing-room, amid music, recitation, and narrative. Mr Ffrench sang, as was his wont, his own exquisite ballads, accom-

panying himself on the piano. His rival bard from the north of the Tweed read from manuscript various stanzas of a work which he was preparing for the press; and Mrs O'Hagan insisted on describing the glories of the Vice-regal Court, and the gratifying attentions which had been heaped upon her by his Majesty's representative. Our Death's-head friend chimed in, from time to time, with a sentence as caustic as it was witty, in revenge for the neglect with which his own stories were treated; and Mr Hogarth tried to get Lady Belmore into one of those half-tender, half-racy dialogues which were to him very precious. But he succeeded only in part. Her ladyship's spirits flagged. She seemed to be thinking more of the journey that was before her, or of something else, than of all the insinuating compliments which the bright young artist paid her, and by little and little the languor which appeared to have come over her extended to her guests. They were not sorry—a rare incident in their social relations with Belmore House—when the servant entered the room to announce that the carriages were at the door.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONSULTATIONS.

LORD BELMORE performed the latter part of his journey, as he had performed the first, without meeting with any adventure whatever. The weather was cold but bracing. No wind blew, and a bright sun shone upon the snow, which covered field and grove as far as the eye could reach, causing it to glitter without melting. It might be about two in the afternoon when he reached the entrance that leads into Baddlesmere Park from a large common, through which, for some time back, his way had lain. The lodge-keepers, seeing a chariot and four approach, threw the gate open, and, recognising their lord as he swept by, curtsied and bowed to him, not

without the expression of surprise as well as respect in their countenances. Onwards the carriage rolled, first through an open glade, then between plantations, and by - and - by down a slope, flanked on either side by young trees ; then over one of the two bridges spanning the river by which the park was bisected, and swerving for a while to the left along a second avenue up to a check-gate. Ford, dismounting, opened this gate, and presently their course lay between a thick grove of evergreens on one side, and a tall yew-hedge on the other. Behind the bays and lares-tines lay the pleasance or ornamental garden ; behind the yew-hedge, acres of kitchen-garden, abounding in fruits and vegetables of every description, and amply provided with hot and green houses. And now the sweep is gained facing the main entrance to the house—a plain circle or oblong of grass—hidden at this moment by the snow—with a gravel road running round it—the latter only partially cleared—which interposed between the mansion and the offices. Why describe either offices or mansion in detail ?

Built in the reign of Queen Anne, or possibly of the first of the Georges, they could, neither of them, set up any claim to admiration on the score of tasteful architecture, nor had any pains been taken, as would be nowadays done, to shut out one class of buildings from the other. As Lord Belmore alighted at the small porch which, with its double door, screened the entrance from the weather, he was in a position to look back upon his stables, his coach-houses, his racket-court, the apartments of his grooms and helpers, and to tell the hour by noticing how the hands stood upon the dial of the clock that surmounted them. He rang the bell, for the porch-door was bolted, and stood gazing round and musing for some minutes before the signal was answered.

At last a woman came to the door, opened it, and started back as if she had seen a ghost. Not that there was any real cause for astonishment. It was Lord Belmore's command that Baddlesmere, whether occupied or not, should be kept at all times in a state of perfect order; so that the family, come when it might, could be

fully accommodated : and though, under ordinary circumstances, due notice was given before the family, or any portion of it, threatened a descent, still the habits of discipline which prevailed among the domestics were such as hindered them from being ever taken quite by surprise. The woman's start was thus a mere nervous movement : there was no feeling, at the bottom of it, of being caught at a disadvantage. Besides, Ford had gone round with the chariot to the servants' entrance, and was unloading there. So that the whole household—for Lord Belmore kept up two establishments—one for town, the other for the country—knew of his lordship's arrival. They were all astir.

Lord Belmore spoke a word of kindly recognition to the housekeeper, who among the rest had hurried into the hall, and passed on. It was a queer rambling house into which he entered : long, narrow, and rising only two stories from the ground. A hall, paved with diamond-shaped black and white marble slabs, as it was open to the roof, and was commanded by a cor-

ridor or gallery on one side, so it conveyed to you the impression, as you crossed the threshold, that the accommodation within doors must be of the most limited extent. But the impression was altogether an erroneous one. Beyond the hall, on the ground-floor, ran a suite of apartments, leading one into the other, so extensive that when all the doors of communication stood open, objects seen at one extremity from the other were seen in perspective. In like manner the chambers, whether you turned to the right or to the left, appeared to multiply, both below and from the corridor, as you went forward. In fact, it was a singularly commodious house—not handsome, certainly, either externally or internally, though the ceilings were profusely gilded, and books and paintings and heavy furniture, rich in its hangings and mountings, did all that such things could do to make it fit to be the residence of a great English nobleman. But all that our readers will take for granted.

The suite of rooms of which we have just spoken

looked out upon the pleasure-ground, and over the pleasure-ground on to the river, and over the river towards the swelling downs, which rose up, feathered with clumps and groves and thick covers, on the farther side of it. By far the most livable among them was the library, with its well-stocked shelves, its commodious writing-tables, its curious old clocks, its gems of art,—not numerous, but of priceless value ; its pictures, busts, and groups in marble and in bronze. Lord Belmore made for the library, and, causing the door to be closed which shut it in from the drawing-room and other rooms that lay beyond, gave his wrapper and greatcoat to Ford, and sat down in front of the fire.

He sat brooding. He had reached his destination, the limits of his journey ; and now for the first time began to ask himself the question, Whether he had done wisely in undertaking it—at all events, so abruptly ? From what danger was he fleeing ? to what measure of safety had he attained ? Could it be worth while now to give any thought at all to consequences ? Was

not the light of life extinguished, so far as he himself was concerned, for ever? Why then take any pains longer to appear what he was not, to play a part which it had taxed his best energies thus far to sustain, but which must henceforth be to him a sheer impossibility? How gladly would he lie down and die! He could not think; he could not forecast the future; and even of the past nothing seemed to come back except a dull, dark shadow, a sort of half-consciousness that all was over—over—over;—not to be renewed any more; no, never! He got up and walked to the window. How desolate and dreary the landscape was! chiming with a melancholy cadence in unison with his own thoughts. The wild-fowl, gathered in heaps upon the surface of the frozen river, appeared to dread the approach of no enemy, for they were perfectly still. A few sheep, with, here and there, a bullock, burrowed in the snow, searching for the pasture which lay deep below its surface. All else was without life, so far as the eye and ear could range, in the heaven above, on the earth beneath, and in

the waters under the earth. Nor was the effect diminished when, by-and-by, as the shadows of evening began to close in, flights of rooks, cawing as they went, made their way from the more distant woods to the taller elms about the house, amid the branches of which they had built their nests. There is music in the rough note of the rook, but it is not calculated to make the heavy heart lighter. Lord Belmore became alive to that fact as he listened ; if, indeed, he can be said to listen who takes in sounds through the ear as he takes in visible objects through the eye—without being conscious either that he sees or hears.

The fantasies that worked their will with the lord of Baddlesmere exercised no control whatever over his domestics. They had their routine duties to go through with, and through with them they went. The cook prepared his dinner, the butler, and Ford, his own man, spread the table. Lights were brought in, the shutters closed, the curtains drawn, and the library made as snug and cheerful as possible. Even Lord Bel-

more acknowledged the influence of these things, and ate and drank with a degree of relish which surprised himself. He even made an attempt, after the debris of the meal had been removed and his coffee was served, to read. But words swam before him on the page, without communicating any ideas to his mind, and he closed the book to pace to and fro from one corner of the room to another. To stand from time to time before the fire as if to warm himself—to range along the shelves, taking out volume after volume and replacing it again,—this was his aimless occupation for more hours than he was himself aware of. At last the striking of the clock upon the chimneypiece startled him. He counted the strokes, and was astonished to find it was midnight. He rang the bell, desired that the lights might be put out, and retired to bed. He slept soundly.

“Tell Mrs Jones to get ready the green room, and to make a good fire in it. I expect Mr Brackenbury from Stokes, to dine and sleep here to-night.”

So spoke Lord Belmore to his valet, as the latter helped him to dress next morning, and the orders thus issued were carried on with due punctuality. It was further settled that dinner should be served, as it had been the day before, in the library ; but that his lordship's private study, which lay between his own chamber and the green room, should be kept well warmed, in order that it might be used that night as a drawing-room. By-and-by, the solitary breakfast over, it was announced that the keeper was in attendance in case his lordship might wish to shoot. His lordship did not wish to shoot. His lordship, in fact, wished for nothing except to be left alone till Mr Brackenbury should arrive. His lordship, however, grew impatient as eleven, twelve, and even one o'clock struck, and no Mr Brackenbury made his appearance. He stepped out into the hall, threw his fur wrapper about him, and walked abroad.

The road which leads from Stoke Rectory to Baddlesmere, though a continuation of that which Lord Belmore had followed the previous day,

brings the traveller up from a directly opposite point of the compass, and lands him at an entrance to the park different from that by which it is approached from the London side. Towards that entrance his lordship directed his steps, passing by a prolongation of the avenue towards a second bridge which spans the river about half a mile or thereabouts higher up the stream than the mansion-house. This he crossed, and was beginning to ascend the gentle acclivity that rises beyond, when, coming round an angle in the wood, a gig containing two persons made its appearance. It was Mr Brackenbury's gig, and the persons in occupation were that reverend gentleman and his groom. The recognition on both sides was prompt, and Mr Brackenbury pulling up, the two friends saluted each other.

"Hadn't you better come up, and my man will walk?"

"Won't it be better for you to alight, and let him drive your carriage home while we walk?"

The latter arrangement was pronounced to be the preferable of the two, and Mr Brackenbury

alighted. They were soon deep in an evidently absorbing conversation. What passed between them it is not for us to say, because there were no witnesses by to overhear it ; but Mr Brackenbury's groom noticed, when a bend in the road brought them under his observation, that they stopped from time to time to face one another, and that, on all such occasions, Lord Belmore was the chief speaker. In fact, so much were they interested in the subject-matter of their conversation, whatever it might be, that their progress homeward seemed to be retarded by it. The sun had gone down before they reached the hall-door. When they found themselves in the library together, it was time to shut out the brief winter twilight.

There was not much more of talk when Lord Belmore and Mr Brackenbury faced each other at the dinner-table that evening than there had been the evening before when his lordship dined alone. Both gentlemen were grave, and they ate their food and drank their wine wellnigh in silence. A few commonplace remarks about politics and the

general condition of the country were exchanged while the servants remained in attendance. But to give utterance even to these an exertion seemed necessary, and it was made chiefly by his lordship's visitor. Now, Mr Brackenbury was known both to Ford and the butler to be, on ordinary occasions, a jovial companion. His intimacy with Lord Belmore was besides very close, and for the most part, when he came a welcome guest to Baddlesmere, he kept the house alive with his jokes, which were capital. To-day he laboured under a degree of restraint quite as oppressive apparently as that which had fallen upon his host. The servants could not avoid noticing this, and Ford having detailed in the housekeeper's room all the circumstances, as far as he was acquainted with them, under which his master had suddenly left Belmore House, the conclusion at which Mrs Jones and her two visitors arrived was that there must have been a tiff with my lady more serious than ordinary.

"You see, gentlemen," observed Mrs Jones, "it's no use us nor anybody else pretending not to see

what is as plain as the nose on my face. They've fell out again. They're always a-falling out now. Leastwise my lady is, for my lord, poor gentleman, would be easy enough if she'd let him. But she won't, you see. Oh! it's terrible to have a suspicious temper. I wouldn't have her temper, no, not if you were to give me all her gould and her rank to boot."

- "Ah! it's just that, ma'am," put in the butler. "It's the rank that's at the bottom of it all. Nobody, you see, cares about her rank, or calls upon her, or comes to see her here in the country, except them queer folks that's so much about her in London. I wish my lord had not done what he did. The gentlefolks never get over such things, and, 'pon my honour, I think they're right."

"But why should that make her so cross to him? He don't use her ill, as far as I see," observed Ford. "He lets her do whatever she likes, and gets about him all the people she chooses to invite. Why, they scarcely ever dine alone up there in London!"

"Very likely," replied Mrs Jones; "but it's not with us ladies as it is with you gentlemen. We don't care for nothing if our equals disrespect us. Do you think, now, that I could find myself 'appy in the servants' 'all though you might?"

"No, no!" exclaimed both gentlemen in a breath; "you could not demean yourself to that. But I suspect there's something wronger than you think of."

"What do you suspect, Mr Ford?"

"I suspect that my lady's jealous,—not that I ever see anything wrong in my lord's goings-on. He pays no particular attention to any of the ladies that comes about the house, and of course he must be at his club sometimes, and may be in the House of Lords late at night. But it's my belief my lady has taken it into her head that he has got tired of her, and taken up with somebody else. There was such a row between them the other night! and Mrs Louise, that is her ladyship's maid, told me that she heard my lady speaking to herself, and vowing before God she would not put up with it, but would leave him."

"Leave him, Mr Ford ! where would she go ? If her life's not a 'appy one with him, I wonder where she can expect to make it more so."

"Ah, you know very little ; you live all your days down here and don't see what goes on up yonder. Shall I tell you what more Mrs Louise says ?"

"Oh yes, oh yes—what is it ?"

"Mrs Louise says that her ladyship has taken quite a fancy to Mr Hogarth, that is the painter gentleman as dines at Belmore House two or three times every week, and is as thick with her as her hand is with her glove."

"Do you believe that ?"

"Well, I don't know ; Mr Hogarth is a very 'andsome man, and he's young, too—I shouldn't think he could be thirty."

"Well, I won't credit no such thing," observed the butler ; "leastwise not till I can't help myself. If her ladyship did a wrong thing once, she is not likely to do it again. And there's the children, Mr Ford ; ladies may leave their husbands, as they sometimes do, but mothers don't often run away from their children."

"Egad!" replied Ford, "it wouldn't be a bad thing for the children if their mother did leave them; they're getting the spoiltest and most overbearingest children that ever I see, and my lady it is that spoils them."

"Well, gentlemen," interposed Mrs Jones, "we can't make nor mend in the matter. It's all in the hands of Him as tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. If they would only go and sit under that gospel minister, the worthy Mr Growler, him as has come to our village and opened a chapel there, he would tell them of the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, and how surely multitudes are hurrying on to it, because they won't believe the truth as he expounds it. If anything could make them at peace with themselves and one another, it would be such a prospect as that."

"What, Mrs Jones! have you become a Methodist? I didn't know them Methodists had made their way into little places like our village, and you're about the last woman in the world I should have expected them to come over."

"Come over or not come over, I wish, Mr Ford,

that you and Mr Crofts here, and my lord and my lady, and all the folks, gentle and simple, were only such as I am, except them—mittens! drat the mittens! they're too tight, I can't abide them—except them bonds."

Here the conversation dropped, and, her visitors retiring, Mrs Jones was left to struggle with her mittens.

CHAPTER XIV.

SCHEMING.

MR BRACKENBURY quitted Baddlesmere soon after breakfast on the day subsequent to his arrival. He and Lord Belmore had spent a long evening together in his lordship's study, and when they parted, as they did at the hall-door, it was with less of gloom than characterised their bearing at dinner the previous evening. It seemed, likewise, as if Lord Belmore had delivered himself from some anxiety in communicating with his old tutor. At all events he saw the keeper, and arranged with him to shoot one of the small covers near the house. He shot fairly, too, killing his birds if the spaniels put them up within reasonable distance, and missing, as in those days

crack shots might very well do, when the dogs got out of hand, and ran away with their game. For sport was sport in the early years of the century; not what it is now, mere butchery. Over the open, pointers or setters travelled, quartering their ground, drawing on their game, pointing, backing, dropping down to charge; and through the covers trotted beagles and spaniels, making the woods ring with their musical voices. Gentlemen did not go out then attended by carts to drag home the dead game, that it might be counted out of doors, because no hall was large enough to contain it; they were content to reckon up the products of their skill by the brace, not by the hundreds, or even scores, of luckless pheasants, hares, and rabbits, shot down as barn-door fowls might be shot if driven from their roosts.

Lord Belmore and his keeper were therefore perfectly satisfied with one another, when his lordship found himself under the necessity of laying his second game-bag, chokefull, on the back of an underling.

Leaving his lordship to attend to such busi-

ness as this, and whatever else the land-steward might bring before him—to mark out old trees which should be cut down, to select open spaces in which new trees might be planted—we return to his better-half, on whom the light talk that passed on Sunday evening in the drawing-room of Belmore House had made a deep and painful impression. It seemed to her as if the fears to which she had yielded, in the course of the six months last past, were about to be realised. She could not doubt that now at length the cause of her lord's frequent absences from home would be manifested;—would be made manifest, that is to say, if by any means she could succeed in connecting him with Mr Hogarth's mysterious story. Did she really desire to accomplish that end? No, truly. There rested on her mind the settled conviction, that if it were once made clear to her that her lord had done her this deep wrong, peace between them there neither could nor should be—no, not now nor for evermore. Why then did she allow her thoughts to dwell so much and so ceaselessly upon one object? Why argue,

reason, speculate with herself? trying continually more and more to make escape out of the difficulty impossible? Could she hope to gain anything by proving her case? Would she not, on the contrary, lose all? Yes—all—everything. Yet it was no more possible for her to rest content in her doubts, far less to put them down and to live in a fool's paradise, than it is possible for the man of preternaturally giddy brain to resist the temptation of throwing himself over the precipice on the brink of which he stands. No, she would find all out, cost what the process might. She would take no rest, day nor night, till the whole truth should be revealed to her; and so determining, she at once laid herself out to find the readiest and surest means of attaining her object.

What was Mr Hogarth's story? A man and a woman had gone to Drury Lane for the purpose of finding there, if they could, a runaway girl. They had discovered her, and also the man with whom she had eloped. There was some confusion in this part of the story no doubt,

especially as concerned the girl. But the man was described as tall, good-looking, and having light hair and whiskers. Lord Belmore was tall and good-looking, and he had light hair and whiskers, but then no such girl sat near him as Mr Hogarth described. Be it so; but she might have sat not far off from him, possibly on the other side of the house, where he could see her. Yes, that must be so. She certainly did recollect, or she thought she did, a dark beauty sitting in the private box opposite to her own. At all events there could be no mistake about her lord having been in very indifferent spirits when they entered the house together; and his sudden illness at the close of the second act, that was a grave reality. And about the people who watched at the foot of the grand staircase, there was truth in that too, for though she had taken no notice of them while the play went on, she perfectly remembered seeing M. de Couvré and something in petticoats beside him as she passed through the hall to her carriage. That thing in petticoats must have been Mr

Hogarth's landlady. Here then were links in the chain, and very reasonable links too. How should she make use of them ?

It wouldn't do for her to seek out Mr Hogarth's landlady. The woman no doubt wanted to extort money out of Lord Belmore. She would never make Lord Belmore's wife the confidant of her secret, because in this case her hold over his lordship's fears would be lost. Neither was it likely that she could get much out of M. de Couvré himself, who, according to Mr Hogarth's showing, was in complete ignorance both of his niece's whereabouts and of the instrumentality by which she had been conveyed away from him. Still she might as well sound the Frenchman. Hitherto she had treated him with studied neglect ; indeed she greatly disliked him, though she had no reason for doing so, nor so much as the pretence of a reason. But she would change her manner and speak kindly to him the next time he came to the house, particularly on the subject of his loss, as Mr Hogarth had described it. If anything came of this, if

any clue were given, she would follow it up by every means that ingenuity could devise and money render available. Had she no other string to her bow? Yes, she had; but as on that she purposely abstained, in the present stage of the business, from fixing her attention, so it appears to us that we should act unfairly by her if we spoke of it prematurely. All these visions, and many more, passed through Lady Belmore's brain, as she lay awake on the Monday morning, waiting till Louise should come and call her. Louise came at last, and her ladyship got up.

"You had better begin to-day, Louise, to set apart such dresses as I shall require at Baddlesmere. You needn't be very particular; we are not likely to be troubled with too much company there."

"Is your ladyship going into the country, then? Of course it's only for a few days. Your ladyship won't stay above a week at the most. We shan't need to take much with us."

"I don't know that, Louise: his lordship pro-

poses to stay a long time at Baddlesmere. We shall probably not come back here for months."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! your ladyship will find that very dull, and somebody else will fret over it too, or I'm much mistaken."

"Who will fret over it, Louise? Do you mean Lord Belmore? Why, the arrangement is his entirely."

"No, my lady, I don't mean my lord. I mean another gentleman that shall be nameless. I shouldn't wonder if he made his way down into the country, too, and settled himself somewhere in our neighbourhood, under a false name. There's nothing gentlemen won't do when their heads are turned with love, like his is."

"What nonsense you talk, Louise! I know what you mean, but you know as well as I do that there is nothing whatever in that. Might it not be my lord rather, whose head has got turned with love, and who prefers keeping his charmer in a sylvan bower, where he may be able to visit her, unobserved by prying eyes? Upon my word the notion's a bright one—Why

not Amelia in a cottage as well as Rosamond in her bower?"

"No, no, my lady! gentlemen like my lord don't do such foolish things as that; they know that, for the arrangements your ladyship is pleased to hint at, there's no place like London. It's only young creatures—Mr Hogarth's one of them, all fire and folly—that run their heads into hedges and think they can't be seen. I daresay my lord has his engagements, just as other gentlemen have, but he won't keep them in the country."

"What makes you suppose anything of the sort?" asked Lady Belmore, in a tone of assumed indifference. The farce was on the whole well acted, but it did not deceive Mistress Louise for a moment. That accomplished Abigail had made it her business, ever since she came into the family, to watch the proceedings of its various members, and had drawn her own conclusions. For a little while after her settlement, Lord and Lady Belmore were much in each other's company. They rode together on horseback; they generally drove out together; his lord-

ship never failed to be with her at all their meals ; he visited nowhere where she did not visit. Latterly a great change had taken place. He was often called from home by business, immediately after breakfast, and did not always make his appearance again, even at the dinner hour ; occasionally he would stay out for three or four days and nights together, on which occasions it appeared that he had accepted invitations from old friends in the country, to whom her ladyship was now a stranger. And the curious part of the business was, that he not only did not take Ford with him on such occasions, but that he invariably sent back his carriage or his horses from Brooks's, which club he appeared regularly to visit on his way to some more remote place, either of business or pleasure. Horses or carriage, moreover, met him again at the same club, and at an hour fixed by him, with the groom or the coachman. These things were not lost upon Louise, any more than she failed to notice the effect which they produced upon her mistress. Now Louise cared nothing about her mistress, but

plots and intrigues were the breath of her nostrils. She, therefore, laid herself out to accomplish two objects : first, to get up, if she could, a counter-flirtation between her lady and the rising painter ; and next, to track her lord, by hook or by crook, to the goal which seemed to have for him such strong attractions. She failed in both her projects. Lady Belmore cared for no living thing except her lord. Her very sons were to her objects of indifference, when compared with their father ; and hence, though willing enough to make herself agreeable to other men, and having her preferences, as all intellectual women must have, she gave no more to Mr Hogarth, with all his talent and personal attractions, than the chastest wife might give to a brother. The poor young painter did not come out of the skirmish equally scot-free. Lady Belmore became to him the goddess of his idolatry, and in spite of repeated assurances from her to the contrary, he persisted in believing that the passion which he cherished for her, and of which he made no secret, was, though she tried to hide the fact from herself,

reciprocated. Hence Louise, besides the consciousness that the coins with which he rewarded her services were honestly earned, had, at least, this to console her under a great disappointment. The young lover was comparatively happy in his delusion. The lady, though she could not be melted into giving so much as a shade of reality to the delusion, was flattered by the gift which he gave her, as all clever and beautiful women are, when men of genius approach them in the character of lovers.

If Louise's failure was partial, so to speak, in the case of Lady Belmore and Mr Hogarth, it proved, so far as the solution of the mystery went that surrounded his lordship, absolute and complete. Neither groom nor coachman, and both were questioned and set upon the watch, was ever able to say what became of their master after he passed the threshold of Brooks's. Once, and only once, when leading his horse towards that point of rendezvous, the groom had seen his lordship get out of a stage-coach in Piccadilly. But the coach drove off before he could approach near

enough to ascertain the points between which it plied, and he did not venture to ride after it, knowing that he should barely have time to reach the door of Brooks's, so as to keep his engagement with my lord. Louise, therefore, though morally satisfied that there was a lady in the case, had no direct evidence to rest upon, such as would justify her dealing with her mistress in more than the vaguest generalities. "She had no particular reasons for saying what she had just said. His lordship was, she presumed, just like other men. They all tired, sooner or later, of what was their own, and his frequent and long absences from home had, she must confess, annoyed and surprised her. If she were in my lady's place she would let him go his own way, and seek elsewhere the companionship which others were too ready to offer."

Lady Belmore by no means relished either the insinuation or the advice that came out of it. She rebuked her maid, and desired that such language should never again be repeated.

"Very well, my lady," replied Louise, "I'm dumb. But gentlemen don't keep the pictures of pretty women in their secret drawers unless there's some reason why they should not hang them on their chimneypieces."

"Do you mean to tell me that Lord Belmore keeps the portrait of a pretty woman in his secret drawer?"

"To be sure I do, my lady. I've seen him take it out of the drawer, gaze on it, kiss it, and put it back again, just, for all the world, as if he had been a boy in his first love."

"Out of what drawer, you silly wench?" answered Lady Belmore, affecting to be tickled as if by a capital joke.

"Well, then, out of a drawer in his writing-box: in the large writing-box that stands on the table between the windows in his lordship's own study."

"That'll do—that'll do, Louise. I am quite ashamed of you. You may go!"

Louise went, chuckling, and perfectly satisfied as to what would follow. Lady Belmore went

down-stairs, rang for breakfast, and, while the servants were laying it, strolled into the library. She locked the door after her, put the key in her pocket, and passed through that noble apartment into a smaller one that lay beyond it. There was no other approach to this latter room, consisting, as it did, of the lower storey of one of the towers which flanked Belmore House at the four corners. It formed, indeed, but a sort of recess, and being very retired, and therefore removed from the noises of the household, Lord Belmore had fitted it up and made use of it as his sanctum. She looked round, and there, sure enough, on the table, between the two windows, stood the writing-desk of which Louise had spoken. She moved towards it. It was locked. Her own keys, a considerable bunch, hung from a chatillon at her side. She applied them one by one to the lock, but none of them fitted. The thought occurred to her of carrying it off, and breaking in the lid if no other process would serve; and she had even taken it up in her arms with this view, when suddenly a voice addressed her. Dropping the box

with a shriek, she turned round and saw Mr Thompson facing her.

"How came you here, sir?" she exclaimed, recovering her self-control with marvellous alacrity. "What do you mean stealing on my privacy? What do you want?"

"Nothing, my lady—I want nothing. I was in the library when you passed through, and wanting to get out again I came to ask your ladyship for the key which you took out of the door when you locked it."

"Sir, you had no business to keep yourself concealed; you ought to have spoken when you saw me."

"I don't think your ladyship would have thanked me for that," replied the tutor. "Is your ladyship curious about that desk and its contents?—for I've a key that fits it."

"Indeed! that's curious too. Well, I did want to see whether there was in this writing-desk a paper of which his lordship is in want; and if you will be so good as lend me your key, I will give it you back again after I have made my search."

"Will your ladyship allow me to carry the desk for you into your boudoir? Probably you would prefer making the search there?"

"I am very much obliged to you. By all means; you are stronger than I, and will carry it better."

Her ladyship was now all smiles. She walked before the tutor, inserted the key of the library door into its socket, led the way to her own boudoir, and there begged Mr Thompson to relieve himself of his burden. "And, by the by, Mr Thompson, it may be as well not to speak of our present proceeding, which looks, I must confess, very like a little bit of larceny."

"Your ladyship need not distress yourself about that. Nobody can question your right to examine my lord's papers if you wish. There is the key."

She took it, only half-relishing the peculiar air with which it was presented, but abstained from making use of it till the donor had retired. Then she applied it to the lock, and the bolt turned. Her heart beat as she threw up the lid. It was

such a mean act, such a despicable proceeding to pry into her husband's secrets thus. It was so humiliating to feel that her baseness had been made manifest to another. For not for a moment did the idea linger with her that Mr Thompson gave her credit for acting on the suggestion of her lord. What then ! She must find out whether or no her place in his affections had been usurped. She did not care what sacrifices might come out of it, what evils follow. The truth, the truth, be it ever so terrible, to attain to that by any means, and at any cost,—there was no alternative between this issue and sheer insanity. She threw back the lid. She undid the buckles or hasps that kept the portfolio in its place, and lifted out the papers with which it was crammed. One by one she spread them out upon the table ; but that of which she was in search was not among them. She thrust her hand next into the body of the desk itself. Something hard encountered it, covered over by papers, and resting upon papers. How her heart fluttered ! how hard it was to breathe ! A desperate effort, and out came

the object, scattering notes, letters, and scraps of various kinds about the floor in the rapidity of its ascent. She held it up. It was a miniature of herself, as she used to be in those days of comparative happiness when first Lord Belmore spoke to her words which he ought never to have uttered. Oh, what a revulsion! The machine which had been wound up to the highest state of excitement suddenly collapsed, and Lady Belmore fell upon the floor in a faint.

How long she might have lain thus she did not know, but when her senses returned she found herself upon the sofa, with Mr Thompson standing over her, holding a bottle of strong aromatic vinegar to her nose, and bathing her face and hands with cold water.

"Where am I?" she cried as she opened her eyes. "What has happened? What are you doing here, Mr Thompson? Where is Louise?"

"I beg a thousand pardons, my lady; but I heard you fall; and remembering the charge you had just given me, I thought it best to come myself

to your ladyship's assistance, and not to call in Louise. I hope that you are better?"

"Much better, Mr Thompson. Very many thanks. I am quite well now. The paper that I was in search of is not there. Pray put the desk to rights again, and lock it up and replace it in the sanctum."

"And this beautiful miniature of your ladyship, what shall I do with that?"

"If I thought that Lord Belmore wouldn't mind, I'd beg you to accept it as a trifling mark of my regard. But that wouldn't do, you see, so I fancy you must put it back again into its proper place."

"Your ladyship would give it me, would you? Oh, how I should value it!"

"Nonsense—nonsense! Mr Thompson. It is of no value to any one except Lord Belmore. Be so good as put it back."

She said this in a tone which marked, though she tried to disguise it, her sense of the exceedingly false position into which she had thrust herself. What did the man mean by a speech so

impertinent as that ? Was she sunk so low that a dependant, the tutor of her sons, a man of mean extraction, without either the manners or the appearance of a gentleman, should presume to insinuate—— No—no ! She could not complete the thought. She would cast it from her.

She did cast it from her. She rose from the sofa ; helped Mr Thompson to replace the papers ; put back the miniature, with her own hand, into the portion of the desk from which she had abstracted it ; and, locking the box, hesitated for a moment whether or no she should restore the key to its rightful owner.

“ I hardly think that you ought to retain this key, Mr Thompson. Is Lord Belmore aware that you can find access through it to the contents of his writing-desk ? ”

“ I don't know, my lady. This key opens my own desk also. His lordship has therefore the same ready access to my papers that I have to some of his. But his papers are nothing to me. I never opened the desk for the sake of examining his lordship's papers.”

“If it be your own key, I have no right to keep it from you. There—take it: and let me again impress upon you the wisdom, for your own sake, of keeping secret all that you have heard and seen to-day.”

“Your ladyship may depend upon it,” replied Mr Thompson, pocketing the key, and conveying the desk back again to the sanctum.

CHAPTER XV.

MACHINATIONS.

LADY BELMORE was completely prostrated by the incidents of the morning. She tried to bear up and go about her ordinary occupations ; but the nervous system had received a shock from which it could not immediately recover. She resisted going to bed ; and that was all. To lie upon the sofa, with a book open before her which she never read ; to think — and think — and think, till thought itself became confused ; to weep and laugh by turns, when no one stood near to observe what she was doing ;—by these incidents alone the progress of the hours through that long, long day were chronicled. Once or twice Louise came in, troubled about her mistress ; but her mistress

dismissed her on each occasion, kindly, yet firmly. On the whole, however, her ladyship's sensations, though they put a great strain upon her system, were pleasurable rather than the reverse. Oh, if she could only persuade herself that he looked at times on the portrait of herself, treating it as Louise had described ! Oh, if it were possible to get rid of the hideous phantom which rose up continually and stood between her and that exquisite thought ! Why should she not get rid of it ? What business had it there ? She had been suspicious. She had stooped to do the meanest, basest thing, expecting to have her suspicions confirmed ; and the result was to force upon her the hope—for she could not call it more—that, after all, her fears might be misplaced. She was thankful for that. She would cling to the belief that there was good ground for thankfulness, till the reverse should be forced upon her. Callers came in due time, and, among the rest, Mr Hogarth. She remembered what Louise had dared to insinuate respecting that gentleman, and she would not see him. Not even the opportunity of inquir-

ing further into the history of the runaway girl and her fair-haired seducer could tempt her to break through that resolution. She was indisposed, and could not see any one, though she sent to him a kind message. So passed the day ; and at night she felt better, and went to bed.

She rose next morning, calm and collected, as if no shock whatever had passed through her frame. She rose, also, restored to her former self—convinced, that is to say, in spite of the fiasco of yesterday, that her worst apprehensions were well grounded, and just as much determined as ever to pursue her inquiries, till she should be able to resolve all these doubts one way or another. For a new light, emanating from the miniature, had come in upon her. If he really valued it, why had he left it in Belmore House ? going away, as he professed to do, for some indefinitely great lapse of time—perhaps for ever ! If that had been the portrait on which he loved to gaze, would he not have taken it with him ? Besides, how absurd to imagine for a moment, that a husband of many years' standing, with his wife

herself always beside him, would value a likeness of her, however skilfully painted, and, still more, worship it and kiss it when he might kiss herself, and worship her too, if he chose, to his heart's content? No—no! She had allowed her imagination to run away with her. She was wiser and juster now. It could not be but that Lord Belmore was committed to some *liaison*, which she was resolved to ferret out and bring to light, be the consequences what they might.

Tuesday was one of M. de Couvré's days for giving French lessons at Belmore House. He would come, doubtless, at his usual hour, and, as usual, go away again, unless she took steps to detain him. His usual hour was twelve o'clock, and eleven had just struck. She rang the bell, and desired that Mr Thompson should be sent to her. He came, looking pale and, as she thought, a little confused; but it was not her cue just then to show any special interest in him. She therefore took no notice of his appearance, but said, rather abruptly,

“ Oh, Mr Thompson, I want to see M. de Couvré

before he leaves the house : it will be only right to give him notice that he must soon lose his pupils."

" Your ladyship need not trouble yourself to do that. I meant to tell him of my own dismissal, and the reasons for it. He would quite understand that, the young gentlemen going to school, there could be no further occasion for his services."

" You must not call it a dismissal," replied Lady Belmore, softened, as it seemed, by Mr Thompson's manner. " Nothing short of the change determined on with respect to the boys would have induced Lord Belmore to part from you. And, by the by, it is quite possible that some other employment may be found for you at Belmore House, if you wish it, after the boys go to Eton. You are fond of a library, I believe, and know the value of a good and rare book when you see it. The library here is in the most perfect confusion. How should you like putting it in order, and making a really good and useful catalogue ? "

“ Nothing in the world I should like so much, provided your ladyship—and Lord Belmore—continued to reside here. I am afraid that I should do my work badly if I were deprived of the supervision of my patrons and benefactors.”

“ We’ll think about it, Mr Thompson. Meanwhile, will you be so good as request M. de Couvré to let me see him before he goes away ? ”

Mr Thompson retired ; and by-and-by her ladyship, having risen and walked to the window, saw the Frenchman coming slowly up the avenue. The sight appeared to recall her to a sense of the delicate, not to say awkward, position in which she would be likely to place herself by questioning M. de Couvré. What could she say to him ? what might she ask that would be likely, by the answers which it extracted, to throw light upon the matter that engrossed her attention. Should she speak to him about his niece ? She might, and all that she was likely to get out of him she had got already at secondhand through Mr Hogarth. Would she allude to the tall handsome gentleman with sandy hair and whiskers,

getting him to say what that person was like, and where he sat in the theatre ? Yes, she would do that—but how ? Oh yes, she saw her way. She would begin by expressing her great commiseration for his sufferings, of which their common friend, Mr Hogarth, had given her an account, and so lead him on to tell all that he saw at Drury Lane, and how he had been affected by it. She did so. M. de Couvré, having completed the hour with his pupils, was ushered into Lady Belmore's presence, and her ladyship dealt with him exactly as she had determined to do. The results awfully disappointed her. M. de Couvré was broken-hearted through the loss of his niece. He went to Drury Lane, hoping to find her there, as her ladyship had learned. But though he had scanned every portion of the house, from floor to ceiling, he saw nothing which in the most remote degree was calculated to awaken one ray of hope as to recovering her. He had seen no tall handsome gentleman with light hair and whiskers. He was not looking out for gentlemen tall or short, fair or dark, but only for his niece, his

one little ewe lamb which had gone astray. Yes, Mrs Todd had dragged him out of the pit, declaring that she had made a discovery. And he stood with her in the hall, just as the circumstance had been explained to her ladyship. But he might as well have been anywhere else—in his bed, or at Belmore House—for nothing came of their weary watch but disappointment.

“Didn’t your landlady—what’s her name?”

“Madam Todd, my lady, a most Christian and kind woman.”

“Well, Mrs Todd; didn’t Mrs Todd say that she had seen the man who took your niece away from you.”

“No, no, my lady! Good God, no! She said nothing of the sort. I do not believe that any man took my niece away from me. My niece was, and if she be alive is, as pure as the snow when it first falls. Whatever evil may have befallen her, nothing has come to pass such as your words imply.”

“Well, M. de Couvré, I can only repeat that, whatever the reason of your niece’s absence may

be, I commiserate you with all my heart. And I am the more grieved that, after this week, my sons will no longer be able to be benefited by your admirable instructions ; they go to school next Monday."

"So Mr Thompson told me. I wish that I could have done more for the young gentlemen. But they are very high-spirited—especially the eldest. It is not easy to get them to attend to their lessons."

"I know, I know ; I have heard as much before. They are young, however ; they will do better as they grow older. The best cure for faults like theirs is to be found at a public school."

"Has your ladyship any further commands for me ?"

"No, none ; except to beg that you will accept this trifling acknowledgment of your past services. You need not take the trouble to come out all this way again."

So saying, she put a twenty-pound note into the old man's hand, at which he looked with surprise.

"This is too much, my lady. My lord is not in my debt more than six lessons at the most. I cannot take all this money for doing nothing."

"It is yours, M. de Couvré, by the laws and customs of England. One cannot, in this country, break a contract without paying for it. Lord Belmore would not consent to break the laws."

She said this smiling, and in her gentlest tone; whereupon M. de Couvré thanked her and Lord Belmore for their generosity, and, putting the note into his pocket, took his leave,

What was she to do now? The Frenchman had told her nothing. Would his landlady be better able to enlighten her? and if she were, how might she be got at? Louise could see her, and inquire. Inquire into what? Into Lord Belmore's manner of living? Into his engagements, as in her impertinence that free-and-easy damsel called them? No, that would never do. Louise was audacious enough already. If she once saw that Lady Belmore suspected her husband's fidelity, and was distressed by the suspicion,

there would be no bearing her. Why should she not employ Mr Thompson? It was very galling, no doubt, to expose her own weaknesses to a person in Mr Thompson's condition; but after all that had occurred already could she flatter herself that they were hidden from that person? Alas! no. Her tampering with the desk in the sanctum; her attempt to carry it away; her acceptance of his aid to get access to its contents; her fainting fit; and the state in which he found her and Lord Belmore's papers;—all these circumstances put together, not less than her caution on the score of secrecy, must have given him already as complete an insight into the state of her feelings as if she had made him her father confessor. What was the use of stopping short now, when by going a very little further she might arrive at a solution of the mystery which made existence intolerable? She would dare the worst. She would take the leap, and take it ere yet time and reflection were allowed to bring up objections to it. She rang the bell.

“Give my compliments to Mr Thompson, and

tell him that I should like to have a few minutes' conversation with him."

"Now?"

"Yes, now; tell him not to wait till the young gentlemen's lesson is over."

Mr Thompson came at once, and found her ladyship flushed and excited. She spoke hurriedly, as if determined to subdue a scruple, and get a disagreeable task over.

"I am going to put great confidence in you, Mr Thompson, and to ask you to do me a very great favour. Are you willing to accept the one and to afford the other?"

"Whatever your ladyship may be pleased to communicate to me I will hold sacred while I live. If I can serve you by the sacrifice of my life, my life will be gratefully rendered up."

"No, no; not quite so much as that. But you can serve me very materially—at least I fancy so; and in order to do so, it is necessary that you should be put in possession of the real cause of my present great uneasiness.

"After what passed yesterday it is scarcely

necessary that I should explain to you the nature of a terrible suspicion which haunts me. Mr Thompson, Lord Belmore is everything in the world to me. Other wives may love their husbands as much as I love mine, though I don't believe that they do ; but there is that in our peculiar circumstances which makes the bare thought of his possible preference of another woman worse to me than death. I don't want him to be always near me, as he used to be in former years. I have no right to expect that he should find in me still what he found, or professed to find, when we first married. But that he should take away his affections from me, and give them to another—no, Mr Thompson, no, I cannot believe, I cannot even suspect that and live. Now I do suspect that, and I want to bring about one of two things—either to be relieved of the horrid suspicion, and to be myself again ; or to have it confirmed, and—I don't know what. Will you be my friend in such a crisis ? Will you help me to find out the truth ?”

“ By every means in my power ; by the devo-

tion of all my energies to your service ; by following him, watching him, dogging him wherever he goes ; by helping you to the fullest possible revenge if he prove guilty ; by scattering the cloud which now obscures your peace of mind if he be innocent."

Lady Belmore was startled by the tone of quiet determination in which these fiery words were uttered. She looked at the speaker, and saw that not the faintest mark or token of excitement hung about his countenance. His cheek retained its natural pallor ; his eye was quiet, almost to dullness ; there was no tremor in his voice, nor nervous twitching about the corners of his mouth. He stood before her the very personification of cool, calm self-possession—the picture of a man who, making no professions, was both able and willing to do any conceivable deed. The longer she looked at him, the more extraordinary was the effect produced upon herself. It was not fear that took possession of her, though the feeling partook somewhat of the nature of fear, because to herself there could be no danger, nor probably

to anybody else, unless she willed it. Neither did his presence overawe her, though she became conscious that she should never again be able to treat him as an inferior or dependant. But the satisfaction which she ought to have experienced at finding in him an instrument so apt for her present purpose, was considerably dashed by the thought that possibly he might prove too apt. She put it aside, however, as well as she could, and replied—

“Don’t mistake me. I want no revenge, even if my worst fears be realised. He shall suffer no hurt from me, nor from anybody else, if I can avert it. All that I desire is to find out whether or no his frequent absences of late, and especially that change that has come over him within the last three weeks, be occasioned by a guilty passion, and for whom.”

Mr Thompson bowed. Nothing had been said here which seemed to require any answer, and he made none. Lady Belmore proceeded:—

“I don’t know whether the poor Frenchman has ever told you, as he seems to tell everybody

else, of his desertion by a niece to whom he was greatly attached. I see by the expression of your countenance that he has. Well, to make matters short, I suspect Lord Belmore of having carried that girl off, and of having established her somewhere in or near London, where he visits her. I would not ask you to help me in settling this suspicion one way or another, but that I think the means of doing so are accessible to one who, like yourself, would be ready to take wise advantage of them ; for I am precluded personally from moving in the case. It seems that M. de Couvré has been persuaded to look for the fugitive, among other places, in the theatres ; and that in Drury Lane, on Saturday night last, not he, but his landlady, who went with him, made a great discovery. Whether they—no, not they, but she, for the poor man himself appears to have seen nothing—whether she saw the girl herself is uncertain. Mr Hogarth, from whom we got the story, spoke confusedly on this part of it. But there is no doubt that she saw a man whom she recognised as the girl's seducer, and, on the whole, I am

inclined to believe, the girl likewise sitting near him. Do you think you could get over this woman, and, without fixing her suspicions on any person in particular, prevail upon her to describe the seducer more fully—to say whereabouts in the house he sat—who sat beside him, and on what grounds she comes to the conclusion that he really is the cause of all M. de Couvré's sorrows? To get at the truth, even as far as her answers to such inquiries as these can reach it, will be to me a satisfaction indescribable."

"You ask me to do no more, my lady, than any servant in the house could do for you; of course I can find out all that,—so could Bruce, or Louise, or one of the footmen."

"But you forget the conditions, Mr Thompson. You don't suppose that I could lay bare my own weakness to a servant?"

"Forgive me, my lady. I had hoped to receive from you a more difficult, possibly a more delicate, commission. I will attend to this, however, and bring you back such information as I can collect."

“How do you think of proceeding?”

“There is only one mode of proceeding, my lady. I will make a pretence of calling on M. de Couvré to-morrow, to speak about the future of his pupils and mine, and getting him on the subject of his great grief, it will be easy to have Mrs Todd called in and to examine her.”

“Why to-morrow?—why not to-day?”

“Because M. de Couvré and I have just parted, and if anything is to come of these inquiries, consistently with the reticence which your ladyship desires to exercise, they must be made, so to speak, fortuitously.”

“You judge right, Mr Thompson: I put myself in your hands. You will carefully keep my secret?”

“To my dying day.”

CHAPTER XVI.

NIGHT-TRAVELLING.

WE left the Rev. Thomas Brackenbury at the hall-door, at Baddlesmere, where his old pupil and friend, Lord Belmore, took leave of him. The reverend gentleman got into his gig with a slight effort, for it was high-hung, and at fifty men are not, for the most part, so lithe as they once were, especially if good living and an orderly or rather somnolent course of existence have increased their bulk, and somewhat flaccified their muscles. He took the reins, and, receiving the groom up into the vacant seat beside him, drove off. He had twelve miles of road, or thereabouts, to accomplish before reaching his parsonage, and the time occupied in compassing

that distance was devoted by him to grave and even anxious reflection. What the thoughts were that passed through his mind it is not our province to reveal, but of the practical conclusion to which they led we need not pretend to make a secret. The mail-coach from Portsmouth to London changed horses in his village. It passed the rectory gate every night at nine o'clock, and reached the Golden Cross, Charing Cross, barring accidents, at six on the following morning. Mr Brackenbury, instead of driving straight home, made at once for the coach-office, and took out an inside-ticket for London that same night.

"You know, sir," observed the clerk, as he handed the bit of pasteboard to the Rector, "that we can't insure you a place. The coach may be full all the way up. But that's not likely—didn't often happen."

"I know all that," replied the Rector, delivering in exchange for the ticket a one-pound note and seven shillings. "I must take my chance, of course. You'll let me know when the coach arrives."

"I will, if I can, sir, but the horses are soon put to, and the guard won't stop for nobody."

"Well, well, I'll be at the office in good time."

Mr Brackenbury was at the office in good time. There was nothing, indeed, to stay him; for Mr Brackenbury was a bachelor, and bachelors' establishments are as easy to handle as their dinners to dress and to be consumed. He walked to the chequers, wrapped up in a thick greatcoat, having his limbs fortified against the cold with a pair of brown leather top-boots, and carrying over his arm two worsted over-stockings or trot-cozies, wherewith, after he should have taken his seat in the mail, he might still farther keep both feet and knees warm. A comforter encircled his neck, and in his coat-pocket was put away, for use when sleeping-time came, a red worsted night-cap, surmounted by a knot or cherry and lined with white cotton. Mr Brackenbury travelled light, so far as baggage was concerned. Indeed, travellers by the mail, in the times of which we are writing, were constrained

to travel light. Coaches painted bright purple, and bearing the royal arms upon the panels, could not be disgraced by having boxes and portmanteaus piled upon the roof, which was sacred to mail-bags, as was the larger of the two boots ; and not unfrequently the lesser boot also. Happily for himself, Mr Brackenbury was so appointed as to suffer no inconvenience from these restrictions. The valise which his groom carried and handed to the porter, already mounted on the roof, was easily stowed away, above the London bags, in the front boot ; and the man, having so disposed of it, jumped down, touched his hat, and was rewarded with sixpence. Presently Mr Brackenbury got inside, where only two passengers besides himself were seated. Three others climbed outside, one taking his place next to the coachman, two behind him, and immediately the words were passed, " All right, Joe "—" all right "—" let go ;" and off the machine went. The guard blew his horn ; the coachman cracked his whip ; four well-bred, well-fed horses bounded forwards ; and away over the frozen ground flew

the vehicle, at a rate not falling short of ten miles in the hour. The pace, of course, moderated when the coach got into the open country. It was only in dashing through towns, and leaving and arriving at the stages, that the driver considered it necessary to press his team to the top of their speed. But an average rate of seven or eight miles an hour was held to be as much as any man could desire to compass in an age when a whole week might be spent in making the voyage between Holyhead and Dublin, and when watches were as big as moderate-sized warming-pans, and seals and locketts hung in heavy bunches from men's fobs, not unfrequently one bunch from each of the two fobs with which his galligaskins were supplied.

The box-seat on a day coach in pleasant summer weather is, or rather was, one of the most agreeable positions in which a traveller could find himself. He sees the country through which he passes to great advantage, and not unfrequently finds in the rubicund, portly individual who handles the ribbons, an entertaining and intelli-

gent companion. Not so the inside of the mail at night, particularly if, as happened to be Mr Brackenbury's fate, drunken men or women sit opposite or near to us. It is difficult enough at all times, and somewhat trying to the temper, how to dispose of our legs ; and, when sleeping-time comes round, where to find a soft corner whereon to rest our heads. But sleep must plead in vain when horrid odours assail our olfactory organs, and beastly bullet-heads come thump upon our shoulders, or dash into our faces, or, it may be, in our laps ; half-uttered and unintelligible imprecations rewarding our endeavours to set them up again. Sorely was the Rector of Stoke's patience put to it during the nine long hours that he spent that night on the road, and very pleasant was his alighting, though it led him through a dimly-lighted passage into a coffee-room where the fire was burned down to the last cinders, and the air reeked with the stale perfume of hot-within, the dregs of which floated in the bottoms of tumblers on every table.

Mr Brackenbury required a bedroom, and he

was shown into one. It was cheerless enough, and very cold ; but the chambermaid lit the fire at his bidding, which just filled the room with smoke, and by-and-by emitted a feeble flame, which had no warmth in it. He lay down in his clothes and dozed till daylight came in, making himself as snug as he could under a blanket and the coverlid. He was called, according to his own directions, at eight, made the best toilet that adverse circumstances would allow, and at nine sat down to weak tea tinged with sky blue, a tough beefsteak, and butter-toast, in one of the boxes in the coffee-room. There was not much either in the meal itself, or in the apartment in which it was served, to tempt him to linger over it. He therefore made short work of all that was set before him, and prepared to go forth on his business. He left word with the waiter that he should return about four o'clock to dinner, and that he should require his bedroom certainly for that night, not improbably for more.

Mr Brackenbury knew London well. Every street, every square, every place of public resort

was familiar to him. He was at no loss, therefore, in guiding his own steps to the point which he proposed to reach. It was No. 39 St Ann's Street, Soho, before the front door of which he stopped and pulled the bell.

"Was M. de Couvré at home?"

"Yes, M. de Couvré was at home."

"And Mrs Todd—was she in likewise? was she well?"

"Mrs Todd was very well, and she also was at home."

"I think I should like to see Mrs Todd first."

Into Mrs Todd's private parlour the gentleman was accordingly shown, and in a few minutes Mrs Todd joined him. There was an immediate recognition on both sides, and a cordial shake of the hand. The landlady was very glad to see her old lodger. The old lodger was delighted to find his *ci-devant* landlady as brisk and lifelike as ever. It was a long while since they had met last, and that was when Mr Brackenbury introduced to her the gentleman and lady who had been her tenants ever since.

"Leastwise the gentleman was," continued Mrs Todd. "But, poor gentleman! he's dreadfully changed. He'll never get over his misfortune; and he's hard put to it, likewise, to make a living, I am afraid."

"What misfortune, Mrs Todd? Is the young lady, his niece, dead?"

"No, not dead, sir, but worse by a great deal. She's gone and left him, and the poor gentleman is breaking his heart because he can't trace her nor find her anywhere."

"God bless me! Mrs Todd, how did that happen? Tell me all about it. I came here on purpose to see them both after I had had my chat with you. What took the girl away, and where has she gone?"

"Ah! them's the very points as nobody can settle, leastwise the last on them. As to who took her away, I don't know what or who he might be, but I'd know him among a thousand if I could only set eyes on him again, as I did last Saturday night in Drury Lane theatre."

Mr Brackenbury was of course astonished, in-

quisitive, and deeply interested. He received from Mrs Todd all the details with which our readers are already familiar, and having heard her story to the end he naturally asked the question, what she proposed to do ?

“ How can I do anything ? It’s no use running up and down London and asking everybody one meets whether they can direct one to a tall good-looking gentleman with fair hair and whiskers. Why, London’s full of such. And if we were to find him, is it certain we should find she ? and if we found she, is it quite certain that we should be all the better for it ? Now you’re a gentleman as knows more nor most folks, what would you advise in such a case ? ”

“ Are you really anxious to discover the runaway ? ”

“ I ?—no. I don’t think I am, but I’m very anxious to make poor Mr Discover’s mind easy ; and if this is not to be done till Miss is hunted out in her hiding-place, I am willing to look for her till I find her.”

“ If that’s the case, let me advise you not to

make too public the fact that you have any clue at all to the man whom you suspect of running away with her. Depend upon it, if you saw him that night, he saw you, and the first thing he'll do, if he suspects you're on his track, will be to spirit her away, and probably himself also, where neither you nor anybody else will be able to follow them. Have you told this story to many people?"

"No, I've told it only to one, but then he's likely enough to spread it all through London. Is it your opinion that it would be best to say no more on the subject to him or to anybody else?"

"That is certainly my opinion, if you have any thought of getting at the girl herself, as you tell me you have."

"Then I'll hold my tongue for the future, and give Mr Hogarth a hint to hold his also. He'll understand my reasons."

"Do in that as you like. Unless Mr Hogarth have some personal interest, in the matter, the chances are that he has pretty well forgotten all that you told him about it by this time. If I were you I would not recur to the subject unless

he did so. But I must not fail to call on M. de Couvré. Will you let him know that I'm here ? ”

“ Poor gentleman ! he's given up the first-floor long ago, and lives now high up in one of our back-rooms. He wouldn't like mayhap to receive visitors there. If you please to sit still I'll ask him to step down and see you here ? ”

“ As you please, Mrs Todd, but take care you don't hurt the poor gentleman's feelings.”

Mrs Todd assured him that her lodger's feelings would not be hurt by her inviting him to see a friend in her own parlour. And she went away to call him.

CHAPTER XVII.

ADVICE—NOT TAKEN.

MR BRACKENBURY drew his chair close to the fire and warmed his hands. He was so employed when a ring came to the front door, and he heard in the passage a man's voice asking whether M. de Couvré were at home. The servant-girl answered in the affirmative, but before further proceedings could come out of the question and reply, steps sounded on the stairs; and Mrs Todd herself, as her well-known accents testified, took up the dialogue with the new-comer where her maid had dropped it.

"M. de Couvré was at home it appeared
Could he be seen?"

"Oh yes, only there's another gentleman in the

parlour waiting to see him on business. Would the gentleman be so good as call again—say in an hour, or maybe less?”

The gentleman would call again, in half an hour, and so the discussion ended.

Mr Brackenbury opened the parlour-door, and expressed himself pleased with what the landlady had done. Would she kindly take care that nobody disturbed M. de Couvré and him while they were together? It was on the tip of his tongue to add a second request that nobody would loiter in the passage; but he happily burked that rather equivocal compliment to the good manners of the household by recalling the fact that M. de Couvré and he could converse more fluently in French than in English, and that probably not an eavesdropper in the house, supposing the house to be full of them, would be able to make head or tail of what might be said in that dialect. He therefore abstained from saying anything more to Mrs Todd, shut the door, and waited for M. de Couvré.

The old man arrived in due time, and, recog-

nising Mr Brackenbury in a moment, shook hands with him cordially. "It was a great pleasure to him to see one who had been kind, not to himself only, but to his lost treasure. All who ever took an interest in her were very dear to him."

M. de Couvré said this in his broken English, and would have probably continued to converse in the same tongue but that Mr Brackenbury answered him in French. Immediately thoughts that conjured up the images of other and happier days crowded in upon him with the sound of the language of his childhood. It was a manifest relief to have had the fountain of these thoughts opened up; and he let it flow freely. Without waiting to be questioned on the subject he poured out all his griefs, telling over again the tale with which our readers are familiar. Mr Brackenbury did not interrupt the old man in his story. Whether it was all new to him or otherwise, he received it as if it had been new, and then led his companion gradually and skilfully to other topics not unconnected with it.

"Have you no notion at all why she went away, or with whom?"

"None whatever. Mrs Todd insinuates that she must have been carried away by some bad man for a bad purpose, and Lady Belmore expressed the same opinion more broadly only yesterday. But I believe nothing of the sort—nothing—nothing."

"Had she no visitors while she was with you—no one coming to see her—no gentleman, I mean?"

"None, none. We hadn't a friend or acquaintance in the world except the Abbé Jerome, who comes to see me occasionally still."

"Did she form no intimacies with any of the players?"

"No. I always went with her myself to the theatre, and waited in the strangers' room till the play was over that I might escort her home. I never saw her speak to a soul."

"But she took her effects with her, of course—her books, her clothes, her papers, and such-like?"

"No, nor that neither. All have been left in my keeping. Her wardrobe, and such books and

papers as she had are in the box which contained all that we were able to bring away with us in our flight from home; and it stands now in my room. No, she took absolutely nothing with her, her theatrical dresses themselves remaining where she left them, in the manager's keeping."

"Of course you have examined the contents of that box?"

"Never—never! I would not so violate her privacy, especially after the solemn charge which she left me not to do so."

"Did she lay this charge on you?"

"Yes, in the letter which announced her departure. I have carried it about me now for close upon six months, but it still hangs together, and is legible. Why should not you read it?"

Mr Brackenbury did read the document. It was written in the small beautiful Italian hand which the well-educated women of France used to write prior to the Revolution. It ran thus:—

"BELOVED UNCLE,—Do not fret—do not grieve—because I go away from you for a time.

Do not think me cruel or undutiful because I cannot tell you either whither I go or when I shall return. It is inexpressibly painful to be separated from you, even for a season ; but the season will soon pass, and when I come back I shall come never more to be parted from my more than father. I write with a heart torn by contending emotions. It is my duty to go ; I cannot turn aside from going. If I were at liberty to tell all, you would see this. Believe me virtuous, honourable, all that you have known me—all that you wish me to be. Believe also that the one drawback to my happiness in going is, that I may not ask you to bear me company, nor yet, for a while, communicate with you in my absence. Some day you shall know all, and, forgiving your child the pain that she put you to, embrace her and say that she acted like a heroine. I leave everything behind me. I shall want nothing where I go. Take care of my few papers ; and please, please neither inspect them yourself nor allow anybody else to do so till I return. I leave between the folds of the shawl that lies at

the top of the box the portrait of myself. You will think of me when you look at it, and I shall know that you are talking to it when my thoughts wing their way back to that dear room where we were all to one another. Be content, be hopeful ; if I live I shall return to you shortly. God watch over you, and have you in his keeping !—Your child, your own darling, MADALINE.”

Mr Brackenbury read the letter, and returned it to his companion. It moved him not a little. But he soon recovered his composure, and reverted to the subject which they had been discussing when M. de Couvré put it into his hand. His views were not altered by what the poor girl had urged. On the contrary, he was satisfied that the circumstance of laying her uncle under an obligation not to examine her papers only the more testified to the wisdom, not to say the moral fitness, of his acting in opposition to her wishes.

“Why should she charge you not to examine her papers, except that among them would be found some index of the cause and object of her

flight. Perhaps you judged well in respecting her privacy thus far. But months have passed, and she is still absent : and you refuse to take the only step which holds out any prospect at all of getting to the bottom of the mystery. Let me persuade and entreat you to see this matter in a different light. Were I in your place, I should certainly look through the contents of that box."

"No, no, you would not. You are a man of honour. You know how sacred are the injunctions of the dying, and—who knows ?—she may have been dying when she wrote that letter."

"Now you are allowing your mind to wander. She was not dying when she wrote that letter ; she was meditating a flight, which she executed ; and speaks of coming back again some day or another as of a settled thing. How can you confuse two matters so entirely different ?"

"Perhaps, perhaps ; but, living or dying, her wishes are law to me. I will not look deeper into that box than I have done till she returns. I could not do it and retain my self-respect."

"Why not, then, allow some one else to look

into it? You really fail in your duty to her, as well as to yourself, by persisting in this strange course."

"Whom could I employ to perform a task so delicate? whom could I trust? Doubtless she has some secret—that I feel. But if she refuse to make me the depositary of it, have I any right to throw it open to strangers?"

"No, not to strangers, but to some friend of your own whom you could trust—to some one who would spare her feelings by declining to communicate even to you anything that he discovered there, unless it pointed to her place of concealment."

M. de Couvré made no immediate reply, but seemed to reflect. "The Abbé Jerome might, perhaps, be trusted. It would be a sort of confessional were he called in."

"I don't think that," interposed Mr Brackenbury. "The Abbé is but a poor English scholar. He would be unable to make anything of documents unless they were written in French or Latin."

"Then the papers in the box must be left unexamined."

"If you felt disposed to put confidence in me," observed Mr Brackenbury.

The Frenchman looked keenly at the speaker as these words fell upon his ear. It was manifest that he understood their purport, though he made as if the reverse had been the case, and replied,—

"There is no man living—except, perhaps, the Abbé—in whom I have greater confidence than in you; and I quite believe that, in advising me to disregard the parting injunction of my darling, you mean the best both for her and me. But I can't follow the advice. The box must be sacred while I live; till she returns, that is to say—till she returns."

Mr Brackenbury saw that it would be useless, under existing circumstances, to press his argument further. He therefore changed the subject, and spoke to M. de Couvré about his own affairs. They were not in a flourishing condition. But for the twenty-pound note which Lady Belmore had given him, he would have been without any

means of subsistence beyond the single gold coin which, before setting out for Bow Street, he had put back into his purse. "But I have a pupil in the house, and I can live very well upon what he pays me. It is the search after my lost lamb that runs away with all my money."

"You must not want for the comforts as well as the necessities of life. You will allow me to open an account for you at Gordon's; and use what is deposited there as if it were your own. When France comes to her senses, and you are a rich banker again, you will repay me, with interest, if you please."

Strange to say, M. de Couvré received this proposal without being at all shocked by it. He seemed to regard the arrangement as an ordinary pecuniary transaction, and went at once into questions of exchange and interest. It was then settled that at Gordon's Bank, in St James's, fifty pounds should be deposited on the first day of each January, April, July, and October; and that a strict account should be kept both by him and Mr Brackenbury, which they were to compare at

intervals of a year. The rate of interest was settled at five per cent, that being the amount fixed by law seventy years ago as the largest which a creditor could demand and recover from his debtor. Mr Brackenbury upon this took his leave, after promising to call again before he left town.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PLOTS AND COUNTERPLOTS.

ON the lower step of the stairs leading from the street to the front door of No. 39, stood, as Mr Brackenbury was in the act of descending from the upper step, a person in the garb of a gentleman. He looked hard at Mr Brackenbury, and Mr Brackenbury looked hard at him, but no signs of recognition passed between them. They were as yet strangers to one another. But the new-comer is no stranger to us : he is Mr Thompson, returned, as he had engaged to do, at the end of the half-hour, and bent on having some conversation both with M. de Couvré and his landlady. The opportunity of questioning both was afforded him, but he took little by his motion. M. de

Couvré repeated to him, as he would have done to anybody that asked him, as much of his own story as he had told to Mr Brackenbury. Mrs Todd, when requested to describe the person whom she suspected of being the cause of so much trouble to her lodger, appeared to have forgotten all about him and her own suspicions.

“You told Mr Hogarth that you had no doubt as to his identity, and he gave the description of the man exactly as you had given it to him. Surely you must remember?”

“I do remember saying something to Mr Hogarth, but what it was I can’t for the life of me recollect. What did he say?”

“He said that you recognised the person who had carried off the young lady in a tall, good-looking gentleman, with sandy hair and whiskers, whom you saw sitting with or without her, I’m not sure which, in Drury Lane.”

“I don’t think I told him that, because it isn’t true. Where did Mr Hogarth tell this tale?”

“Why, at Belmore House. He told it before all the company, and so much interested our sym-

pathies in your lodger's cause that I've come here at Lady Belmore's desire to offer you every assistance that she can afford in tracing out the fugitive. Surely he cannot have misunderstood you?"

"He must have quite misunderstood me. I told him no such story. I couldn't have, for it isn't true."

"But there were certainly some persons whom you did your best to tackle, for you lay up for them in the lobby, and failed to get at them, because a crowd broke in between you."

"Did I? Well, perhaps I did. I think there was a gentleman in the house that night that I had seen before—leastwise, that I thought I had seen; but I may have been mistaken—I'm pretty sure that I was."

"There was a gentleman, then, in the house whom you recognised? Where was he sitting?"

"In a box, I think. I don't think it was either in the pit or the lower gallery."

"In what box?"

"Oh, I'm sure I couldn't say. I don't know one box from another."

"Was it a box near the stage, or far removed from it?"

"If you were to kill me I couldn't tell. I'm not even sure that he sat in a box at all."

Mr Thompson felt altogether at a loss what to think. The woman was either forgetful to an extent that was marvellous, or, for some reason or another, she had made up her mind not to communicate any information to him. He was silent for a moment, considering what it were best to do under the circumstances. To go back to Lady Belmore, having learnt nothing at all, would be humiliating in the extreme. To seek an interview with Mr Hogarth, and try to get out of him more than he had stated at Belmore House, might be attended by consequences inconvenient to all concerned. On the whole, however, he inclined to the opinion that it would be better to incur the risk of these possible inconveniences than to return whence he had come entirely baffled. He therefore desired to know whether Mr Hogarth were at home and could be seen.

"Mr Hogarth was at home, but she knew that

he was very busy just at that moment. Mr Discover gave him lessons in foreign tongues, and this was his hour ; she had just seen him go into Mr Hogarth's room."

"This was most unfortunate ; at what time was Mr Hogarth likely to be disengaged ? He had a commission for him from a lady of rank, and could have wished to deliver it that morning."

"Well, if the gentleman would come back about noon any day, he would probably find Mr Hogarth in his painting-room—would he leave his name ?"

"No ; his name was of no consequence—Mr Hogarth wouldn't know it ; he would call again to-morrow at the hour Mrs Todd suggested ;" and so he went away.

Mr Thompson was greatly put out ; he could not see his way to anything that was likely to help him in the task which he had undertaken to execute, for in the lobby a second disappointment overtook him. He asked the maid-servant, by way of speaking a civil word to her as she opened the door to let him out, whether she had been

long in her place, and got for answer that she had come to it only two months ago. Two months ago! that was quite useless—the girl had eloped six months ago. But there might be another servant on the establishment of longer growth there; and if there were, something might be got out of her. Yes, that dodge could be tried, but not now. He had allowed the door to be closed on him without so much as ascertaining whether the damsel had a fellow-servant. He could not go back for the express purpose of making such an inquiry as that. No; but he would put forth feelers in that direction on the morrow, and, in the meanwhile, should go home to report progress. He got upon the top of the first stage that he encountered, and was put down at the lodge-gate of Belmore House.

It was still early in the day, not later than twelve o'clock; her ladyship could not therefore have gone from home, neither was it probable that visitors would be with her. So believing, Mr Thompson made straight for her ladyship's boudoir and knocked at the door. He entered

and found that she was not alone. On a seat opposite to that which she occupied near the fire a gentleman was sitting, whom, at the first glance, he recognised to be the same he had encountered on the front steps of No. 39. The recognition was mutual, and there passed between the two a glance which indicated pretty plainly that each suspected the other of being about no good.

“This is Mr Thompson, Mr Brackenbury, the gentleman under whose care the boys have grown up. I hope—indeed I don’t doubt—that your brother will find them well grounded in their classics.” So spoke Lady Belmore, explaining to the beneficed clergyman, and former travelling tutor of her husband, who the young man was that had intruded himself somewhat unceremoniously into her private apartment, but not condescending to introduce the gentlemen to one another as the formal customs of the age required, when men of equal rank met under the auspices of some third party known to both. Mr Brackenbury and Mr Thompson equally understood, and were equally affected, though in different ways, by the

circumstance. The former made a slight indication of the head as if recognising the presence of an inferior; the latter took no notice, but addressed himself to Lady Belmore.

“Monsieur de Couvré will write out a list of the elementary books which he would recommend the young gentlemen to take with them to Eton, and send or give it to me to-morrow. He was engaged in giving lessons to Mr Hogarth when I called, and could not see me.”

“Thank you, Mr Thompson, I have given you a great deal of trouble, but you know I am most desirous that the boys should be good modern linguists as well as classics. I will see you by-and-by on that subject.”

Mr Thompson took the hint and withdrew. He flattered himself that he had so accounted for his appearance at No. 39 as to throw a whole peck of dust into the eyes of the strange gentleman. He never was more mistaken in his life. Had he said nothing, Mr Brackenbury might have thought little; as it was, the obvious contradiction between the cause assigned for the visit to No. 39, and

the words spoken in the lobby of that tenement, in a tone of which the little story just told gave back the echo, caused him to think much. In like manner Mr Thompson, though he found it difficult to assign a reasonable motive for it, was startled by finding this man, whom he had met face to face at No. 39 an hour ago, closeted with Lady Belmore, and apparently in confidential talk with her. Could she have opened her griefs to this person also? No, that was highly improbable. Mr Brackenbury's name was strange to him; he had never heard it till now—certainly not as belonging to one of the gifted throng whom her ladyship honoured with her notice. Could she be making arrangements with him about the reception of her sons at Eton? Scarcely; for it was not with Mr Brackenbury himself, but with his brother, that she proposed to board them, and masters at Eton are not much in the habit of transacting their business at second-hand even through the medium of brothers. No, there must be something else in the wind; and though he entirely failed to realise what that something else might

be, further than that it connected itself somehow with the house in St Ann Street, he determined to keep his eyes open, and find out, if he could, which way the wind was setting. Such were the thoughts that passed through Mr Thompson's mind as he betook himself to the schoolroom, where his pupils were waiting in utter idleness, not without mischief done to their books and their apparel, in the settlement of a quarrel which had broken out between them and come to blows.

Mr Brackenbury remained with Lady Belmore not more than ten minutes after Mr Thompson had quitted her. He took the road to London, and walked on, musing, till a stage should overtake him. A man of great penetration, shrewd, and skilled in reading character, he had, in the course of half an hour, taken thorough measure of her ladyship's condition and purposes. Perhaps he might have been in some degree prepared for doing so by conferences held elsewhere. Perhaps his long intimacy with the family was of itself sufficient to give to him, a keen and habitual observer, an insight into the most hidden

recesses of the mind of each individual member. Be that as it may, he carried with him a settled conviction that Lady Belmore was mad with jealousy; and that there was no measure at which she would stop in order to settle her own doubts, be the consequences to herself and others what they might. As to Mr Thompson, he saw at once, putting this and that together, that he was her ladyship's instrument. He had been to 39 in search of information which he had manifestly not obtained. He was going there again, hoping, perhaps having reason to expect, that he would be more successful on a second attempt than he had been on the first. He—Mr Brackenbury—must see to this. He would go straight to 39 himself, and, ascertaining how the land lay, make such dispositions as should frustrate this meddling individual's schemes, whatever these might be. He was as good as his word.

Overtaken by a stage, he got in, and was put down at that great rendezvous of short stages seventy years ago, the White Horse Cellar, in Piccadilly. To walk thence to St Ann Street

took less than a quarter of an hour ; and Mrs Todd was in her parlour to receive him. He rushed at once *in medias res*.

“ You had a visitor, Mrs Todd, after I left you ? ”

“ Yes, sir. A gentleman, as said he came from Lady Belmore, called, and put a great many questions to me about that there good-for-nothing young woman, and the man as she is supposed to have gone away with. But I remembered the advice you gave me, and told him nothing.”

“ You acted very wisely, Mrs Todd. I have reason to believe that the person who called upon you—he was a dark man, about six-and-twenty, I suppose, of slender make, and perhaps a little taller than I am ? ”

“ That’s the man, sir. That’s him as came here.”

“ Well, Mrs Todd, he’ll probably come again, and try to get over you, and, I daresay, over your servants also. You have two servants, I think ? ”

“ Yes, sir ; I always had, as you must remember, ever since my poor husband died, and I took to letting lodgings ; and one of them’s been with me seven years or more.”

“ You must not only be on your guard yourself against giving him the least idea that you have any knowledge at all of the person who is suspected of carrying away the girl, but you must caution your maids that they answer none of his questions. He’ll come to you with a cock-and-a-bull story of some lady—Lady Belmore, perhaps—having sent him. But don’t you believe a word of that. He’s in the pay of those whose object it is to keep the girl in the dark, and who, the moment they discover that you or anybody else has any inkling of her whereabouts, will spirit her away to some place where it will be impossible to trace her. You see you’ve roused my interest in your lodger ; and as I mean to help him, and am persuaded I have the power to do so, I don’t mean to be thwarted.”

“ Why, he did say just as you suppose, that some fine lady—it was Lady Belmore—sent him.

I'll tell him nothing, and I'll put Ann on her guard also. But, Lord love you, Mr Brackenbury! what do I know that's either worth telling or hiding! I've no inkling of her whereabouts. All that I'm certain sure of is, that a tall, good-looking gentleman, with sandy hair and whiskers, used to come and see her when the old gentleman was from home; and that, from the day she went off, I never set eyes upon her, nor upon him neither, till I saw him the other night in Drury Lane."

"I tell you, if you were to let the person who cross-questions you know even this much, we should have no chance whatever of finding out what has become of the girl. Would you mind my seeing your servants, and giving them a caution?"

"It's no use cautioning Jane—her as let you in just now; she's been with me only a few weeks. She never saw the young lady. And I think, sir, that maybe it would be as well for me to speak to Ann as for you. If you spoke to her, she would begin to think more of the matter than

it's worth ; and might, out of a spirit of contrari-ness, put herself in the way of being questioned, and, mayhap, tell what little she does know to anybody that would pay her for it."

"You are a sensible woman, Mrs Todd. You are perfectly right. I'll leave Ann in your hands, and call again to morrow evening, just to hear what has been done in the whole matter." And so he went on his way.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE VILLA.

HE went on his way ; but it was not in the direction of the Golden Cross, Charing Cross. He returned to the White Horse Cellar, Piccadilly ; and waiting there till a stage came and changed horses, and headed round again in the direction of the pleasant village of Tottenham, he took his seat in it, and was driven away. He got out again considerably on this side of the village, at a point towards which London was even then beginning to extend,—a sort of detached hamlet or rather street of villas, of which, though all were marked out and a good many begun, not more than three or four were finished. They were very pretty villas, standing each in its own little gar-

den, admission to which was obtained through a door let into the wall which closed them from the road. He rang the bell of one which bore the inscription Rositer Cottage, and presently a young woman opened the door and confronted him.

“Was the villa to be let?”

“Yes; it would be in a week’s time. But the house was rather in confusion at that moment; and some days would be required to put it to rights.”

“Could he be allowed to look over it?”

She would inquire, and let him know.

She closed the door after saying this, and went back into the house, where she remained considerably longer than he either expected or desired. Full ten minutes, indeed—an age when we are waiting—must have elapsed ere her footstep sounded again on the gravel; for the Tottenham stage passed every quarter of an hour, and a second had come and passed on before she made her appearance. She came, however, at last, with a message that the gentleman might see all the house except one room, which, how-

ever, was the best bedroom, and would be quite ready for inspection in a few days. Mr Brackenbury entered. There were still patches of snow here and there on the branches and under shelter of the shrubs ; but from the lawn and the gravel-walk which skirted it, partly the rays of the sun, partly the broom in the gardener's hand, had removed it. Mr Brackenbury followed the maid along that path, up a flight of four or five steps, and through a wooden porch with tendrils trained over it, into a little lobby or hall which communicated with the drawing-room. The room is not altogether strange to us. We have either seen it before or another very like it ; for it is furnished, not extravagantly, but in the best possible taste—has a piano against one of the walls, and looks out upon the lawn. Mr Brackenbury was requested to sit down, which he did, upon the sofa, till the landlady should appear.

She came in due time, an elderly person dressed in mourning.

“ I fear, madam,” said Mr Brackenbury, “ that I have broken in upon you at an unfortunate

time? I'm afraid, judging from your dress, you've had a death in your family?"

The landlady pulled out her handkerchief and applied it to her eyes as she said,—

"Yes, sir, and no—there has been no death in my family; but the lady who lodged here died only on Saturday last, and was buried the day before yesterday. She was a foreign lady, sir, but the sweetest and best lady that ever came into a house; and you see we've not been able to get the place quite to rights yet."

"Poor lady, poor lady! And you were much attached to her?"

"How could we help it, sir? She never gave trouble more than she could possibly help. She quite took to my daughter Agnes that waited upon her, and gave her lessons in French, and in music, and in singing. Oh, sir, if you had but heard her sing! it was like the voice of birds."

The landlady renewed her weeping as she gave utterance to this eulogy, and Mr Brackenbury seemed to be so touched by it that he put to her no more questions. He did not ask, which was

curious, either what the poor lady died of, whether she were married or single, or what countrywoman she was. On these latter heads he received, however, gratuitous information, for the lady of the house added, with sobs, "She was a foreigner, poor thing! a Frenchwoman, she said; and her husband was in business in the city, and could not always be with her. I never did see a couple so attached. Poor gentleman! what he will do, now she is gone, is more than I can guess."

Not a question, such as these observations might have been expected to suggest, was asked by Mr Brackenbury. He seemed to be more desirous of informing himself about the capabilities of the apartments than about the history of the couple in whose occupation they had last been, and was led, at his own desire, over most of them. At last they arrived at an apartment up-stairs, the door of which was not, like the rest, thrown open.

"This, I suppose," he said, "is the chamber of death? May we not see it?"

"I couldn't go into it, sir—I couldn't, indeed, go into it yet," replied the landlady. "It's all aired and put to rights, I know, because we had help to clean up. But I should see the poor creature as I saw her last, so pale, so beautiful, and I'd break my heart."

"Pray don't do that, madam. On me, as a stranger, the place can produce no such effect. Indeed it soothes and solemnises me to stand in a room whence the soul of a fellow-creature has recently taken its flight. I should be really obliged if you would allow me to go in and remain a few minutes in private devotion."

"You are a minister of God, sir, I see," replied the landlady. "Enter, by all means, and stay as long as you please. I will wait for you below."

Mr Brackenbury opened the door, entered, closed it after him, and bolted it. There stood the bedstead, denuded of its furniture, with the white dimity hangings thrown up over the canopy, the white curtains drawn at the window, the blind let down, the carpet raised, the grate

empty and clean, the chairs and tables in their places. Over these Mr Brackenbury cast a rapid glance, and then, instead of kneeling down, made direct to the wardrobe, to which he applied a key. It flew open in a moment, and in a moment more a drawer was pulled out. It was empty. Not a letter, not a paper of any kind, except a few fragments scattered over the bottom, was there. He drew his breath quick, and tried another and another. They were all in the same predicament. Somebody had been beforehand with him ; for the papers, if of papers he was in search, were gone. Mr Brackenbury put back all into their proper places, closed and locked the wardrobe, and turned away. To draw back the bolt softly, and turn the handle of the door, was to him the work of a moment, and he descended to the drawing-room. He found the landlady, and her daughter beside her, turning over the leaves of a book, which proved to be a missal, having the Latin on one side of the page and a French translation on the other.

"It was her prayer-book," said the landlady, rising as he entered; "and Agnes explains it to me. I love to look into it and hear it read, because it was hers. But I'm afraid you hurried yourself."

"I did not wish to keep you long waiting," he replied. "And now about terms. What shall I say to those that sent me?"

"Oh, then, you don't want the lodgings yourself?" asked the landlady; "because, you see, we're very particular. We won't have any but quiet respectable people here, and we expect good references."

"The parties for whom I am making inquiries are highly respectable. What alone I am doubtful about is that you are a little too far from town, but, on the other hand, the stage is a great convenience. May I ask your terms?"

The terms were stated and not objected to; and it was arranged that if his description pleased, Mr Brackenbury could either come in person, or let her know by letter who her lodgers

were to be, and to whom she might refer in the matter of their respectability. If he did not come or write within two days, the landlady would understand that her lodgings would not be required.

Mr Brackenbury passed down the steps, along the gravel path, and, attended by the maid-servant, was let out into the road. He had a habit, how acquired is uncertain, of looking sharply about him whenever he came out of a house, or turned into a new street or lane. He did so on the present occasion, and saw a sight which gave him almost more trouble than the discovery that the wardrobe-drawers were empty. His eye fell upon an object which there was no mistaking, though an attempt was evidently made to escape detection. Mr Thompson turned sharp round just as Mr Brackenbury emerged from the door in the wall, though not so sharply as to present his back to the gazer before a perfect recognition of his features had taken place. Without a moment's hesitation Mr Brackenbury rang the bell again, and, apologising for the act,

walked straight back into the house, and saw the landlady.

"I am so confident," he said, "that your lodgings will suit my friends, that I will engage them at once—say for half a year. And that there may be no mistake, I will pay the whole, or as much of the rent in advance as you please."

"I am much obliged to you, sir," replied the landlady; "but, as I said, we are very particular. I could not think of letting my lodgings, even on these terms, without a good reference."

"I quite understand that. When I hire the lodgings, and pay for them in advance, I do so on the understanding that the reference will be satisfactory to you. Is the name of Dr Sumner known to you—the great doctor of Green Street?"

"Oh yes, sir. He was called in to the poor lady, but it was too late. Anybody recommended by Dr Sumner we shall be glad to receive."

"Very well. We will put all this down in writing, so that there shall be no mistake; and

all that I ask is, that you will not listen to anybody else that may propose to take the lodgings, or desire to see them, or inquire as to who has them now, or who may have had them last. My friends are very particular, and can't stand being made in any way the object of idle curiosity."

To all this the landlady was very agreeable. A sheet of paper was accordingly produced, on which Mr Brackenbury drew up the form of an agreement, binding the owner of the house on one hand, and himself on the other, to a condition of lease similar to that which he had sketched in conversation, only expressed more fully and in greater detail. A duplicate was made, and both copies were signed, Mr Brackenbury signing as John Smith; the owner of the domicile, as became an honourable and upright woman, affixing her proper name to the document. Mr Brackenbury thereupon, taking possession of his own copy, handed to the landlady certain Bank of England notes; and the return stage happening to appear just as for the second

time he cleared the door in the wall, he got into it, and was driven safely to Piccadilly.

What about Mr Thompson all this while? He had watched Mr Brackenbury go down the avenue of Belmore House ; had followed him at a distance along the London Road, till he saw him mount a stage ; had plodded forward entertaining no doubt as to the point towards which he was hastening, and reached a hiding-place, not far removed from 39, just three minutes before Mr Brackenbury came out of it. To dog his footsteps cautiously, to take note of the coach into which he got at the White Horse Cellar, to mount the roof of the next that drove up, all this came to him, so to speak, by intuition. His coach-journey was, however, little better than a wild venture, till he saw the individual of whom he was in pursuit standing outside the door in the wall. Mr Thompson accurately measured his ground, and keeping his seat just so long as to put him out of eye-shot of the place where Mr Brackenbury was standing, he got down and retraced his steps. How he was discovered

loitering in the lane we have already explained. What he did afterwards is soon told.

Having seen Mr Brackenbury get into the coach, and waited till it turned the corner and was out of view, he went up to the door and rang. The maid answered, and he did as Mr Brackenbury had done, inquired about lodgings. The maid did not know—she would tell her mistress. Mr Thompson, as she turned inside, made an attempt, though not a rude one, to enter with her. That, however, she resisted, locking the door in his face. He had not very long to wait before she reappeared. The lodgings were not to let ; they were engaged.

“Could he see the owner for a moment?”

“No ; her mistress was busy, getting the house ready for new-comers.”

“Might he ask to whom the lodgings were let?”

“The maid didn’t know.”

“Was it to the gentleman who had just gone off in the stage?”

“She was sure she couldn’t tell. Mayhap it might, mayhap it mightn’t.”

"He was very anxious to see the place. He had particular reasons for wishing to see it."

"She couldn't help that. Her orders were to let nobody in."

"Was there any lodger in the house now?"

"Not that she knew of."

"Did not a lady lodge there?"

"No lady lodged there now. One was expected, she believed, and a gentleman too, but she wasn't certain."

"Thank you; that will do. I'm sorry you couldn't let me in now. If I come by-and-by, perhaps I may fare better. Here's half-a-crown for you; and when I do come, you will, I hope, let me get a peep both of the lodgings and of the lady who took them."

The maid accepted the money, curtsied, and thanked the giver; told him that the gentleman who had just gone away had signed an agreement, and looked what, however, she certainly did not add—her willingness to oblige him as much as she could.

He felt that for the present all that he had the power to do was done, and mounted a return stage better satisfied with the results of his inquiries than Mr Brackenbury could pretend to be, though possibly not one whit nearer to the accomplishment of his wishes.

CHAPTER XX.

DISAPPOINTMENTS.

MR BRACKENBURY was sore troubled by what had come to pass. The sight of that impertinent intruder on other men's privacies angered and disgusted him. He had pretty sure confidence, however, that the intruder would fail to gain any information that could be of use to him, and dismissed the fellow from his thoughts with a sort of objurgation, which cannot be said to have been strictly clerical in its tone. But the issue of his own visit to the villa in Tottenham Court Road rested on his memory with great concern as well as great tenacity. What should he do next? It was pretty clear that, not only had the contents of the wardrobe been overhauled, but that any

papers which were of value had probably been preserved, and were now in safe keeping, where they might not easily be got at. Would he go back to Baddlesmere, report progress, and hold further consultation? Or might he venture, on his own responsibility, to make another move before leaving town? Mr Brackenbury was a bold man. He had no dread of responsibility. So far he would have made an excellent statesman or soldier, and, sooth to say, boldness was not the only qualification which is good in soldiers and statesmen of which he was possessed. After a little deliberation, therefore, he made up his mind to hazard the additional move which suggested itself to his thoughts; and he did hazard it.

Alighting at the White Horse Cellar, he made straight for Green Street, and knocked at Dr Sumner's door. The Doctor was at home, but was just going out again — indeed the carriage stood at the door. But he would probably see the gentleman if he sent up his card. Mr Brackenbury sent up his card, and the servant, returning almost immediately, begged him to follow.

He was ushered into the consulting-room, on the rug of which, with his back to the fire, the Doctor was standing. He made a low bow as Mr Brackenbury entered, but never requested him to be seated. His manner, indeed, was cold and reserved, and he waited, without speaking a word, to be addressed. Mr Brackenbury waited also in silence till the servant departed, closing the door after him. We do not feel at liberty to repeat what passed between the interlocutors. All that we are in a condition to say is, that they conversed as men do who have no great esteem for one another, and that only a very few words of their parting addresses reached other ears than their own.

“I have no interest in this matter any more than yourself, but we are equally bound, I presume, to save the honour of the family if we can. I should have been glad if you had felt yourself at liberty to favour me with a sight, at all events, of any documents that may have come into your hands, in my poor opinion, unfairly.”

“I have no documents to show. Nothing came

into my hands unfairly. And allow me to add, that if such documents were in my keeping, you are the last man alive to whom I would intrust them."

"I am much obliged by the compliment; but, putting all considerations of an individual so humble as myself out of sight, it may, I suppose, be inferred that you would not willingly wreck the peace of others?"

"I wreck no man's peace; I don't mean to wreck it. It is not for me to act in any way till others require me to act, and then you may depend upon it that no false delicacy will restrain me from doing what I believe to be right. Have you anything more to say?"

"Nothing; except that she seems to have quite lost her senses, and is employing a black-guard, the tutor of her sons, to fish out information. You'll give him no information, I hope?"

"You have no right to hope or expect anything from me. You have still less right to insinuate that I am other than a man of honour. I wish you good-morning."

Mr Brackenbury had little reason personally

to rejoice over the result of his interview with Dr Sumner. But he could see as far into a millstone as most men, and he quitted the Doctor's presence, satisfied that from him no line of action unworthy of a gentleman and a man of honour need be apprehended. He held his course, therefore, comparatively relieved, towards the Golden Cross, where he arrived not long after the hour that he had appointed for dinner. He eat his beefsteak, drank his pint of port, and finding time hang heavy on his hands, set out again at six. He turned his face towards the nearest theatre, and took a seat in the pit on the third row from the stage. It was one of the minor theatres, of which there were quite as many in London sixty years ago as there are now, and of which all were well attended. He gave his entire attention to the play, and was not, therefore, aware of the irruption of the half price, till the thickening crowd began to inconvenience him. Just then he looked round, and saw struggling among the rest M. de Couvré, who with great difficulty made his way to the

centre of the house. The poor man never sat down either throughout the performance of the two last acts, or till the afterpiece was ended. He stood all the time gazing, not at the stage, but at the boxes and the galleries, evidently looking for some object which he failed to discover. Mr Brackenbury did not think it necessary to make himself known to the Frenchman. He, too, remained till the entertainments were over, and noticing the exit of M. de Couvré among the throng, he made his own way into the Strand, and thence back by the nearest route to the Golden Cross. He went to bed and slept soundly.

Meanwhile Mr Thompson had gone his way also, and had taken his own line of action. He made all haste to Belmore House, whence, however, Lady Belmore had gone out in the carriage. This vexed him a little, not because the time lost could be of any serious consequence, but because when our minds are full of a particular subject on which we are anxious to communicate with others, any delay in finding the opportunity to

gratify that desire troubles us. His next inquiry was after his pupils. They, too, were out—they were gone with their mother. There was nothing to disturb him in that circumstance. He cared, in point of fact, as little for his pupils as they cared for him; and though given to books, he hated the business of tuition as much as a certain personage, not usually referred to in polite society, is said to hate holy water. Mr Thompson accordingly adjourned to the library, where he did his best to push things present into the background, by reading or trying to read about things past. But in that attempt he scarcely succeeded. Printed words passed before his eyes without conveying any clear or consecutive ideas to his mind. He shut the book, put on his hat, and walked out into the grounds.

It was getting dark when the sound of wheels on the gravel warned him that Lady Belmore was probably returning. He entered the house by a backdoor, and managed to be standing in the hall when her ladyship passed into it from the porch, followed by her sons. She greeted him kindly

as she disencumbered herself of her furs and shawl, and requested him, after he should have had his evening meal with the boys, to come to her in the boudoir. He was not inattentive to the command, but, hurrying over the tea, set the lads the tasks which they were to prepare for him against the morrow, and left them.

"I say, Charley, old Thompson's a good deal with mamma now. What's he up to?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied the younger of the two brothers, to whom the elder had made this appeal, "but the more he's with mamma the less we see of him. I hate him!—don't you?"

"I should think so; there never was such a bully. I'm so glad we're going to Eton. Aint you?"

"I'm so glad that fellow's not going with us. Do you mean to learn what he's set you, for I don't?"

"Not I. Where's the use? If one got it all up, the odds are he wouldn't hear one."

While the young gentlemen were thus opening their minds one to the other, the tutor was

closeted with Lady Belmore, to whom he reported in detail all the incidents of the day, with which our readers are already acquainted. The lady listened with intense interest. Her colour went and came while he described his own manœuvres and the manœuvres of the enemy whom he persuaded himself that he had succeeded in circumventing ; and when he spoke of the villa, and of his conference at the gate with the maid-servant, she ceased for a moment to breathe. Recovering herself, however, by a great effort, and putting on, as far as she was able, an expression of perfect calmness, she said,—

“And your impression is——?”

“That the person whom your ladyship is desirous of tracing to her home is, or will soon be, the inmate of that villa.”

“Is, or will soon be ; which is it, do you think?”

“I am not sure, but my belief rather is that she is not there as yet—that she is expected shortly.”

“Why not there now ? The woman’s answers seem to me to have been framed on purpose to mislead you.”

“It may be so; but, as I have just said, the impression on my mind is that she is only coming to that villa; and, if your ladyship will allow me to say so, that she is changing her residence in consequence of what may have passed between your ladyship and——”

“Between Lord Belmore and me, you meant to say? That’s impossible. Nothing beyond the vaguest generalities ever passed on that subject between Lord Belmore and me. But possibly the scene in Drury Lane, and the suspicion that inquiries would arise out of it, may have led to some such arrangement as you hint at. Are you quite sure Mr Brackenbury didn’t see you?”

“Quite sure. I was a good way removed from the gate when he came out, and on the other side, too, furthest up from the line of road that leads to London. I caught the outline of his figure before it cleared the doorway, and turned my back to it in a moment. He could not possibly see my face, entertaining no suspicion that I was there. I don’t suppose he took the smallest notice.”

“Mr Thompson, I can’t tell you how much I

feel your kindness. You have laid me under an obligation which I shall never forget. But gratitude is, you know, only a lively expectation of future favours, and now I am going to impose upon you fresh labour. I want you to go with me to that villa to-morrow or next day. I must make my way inside. I must see with my own eyes whatever there is to be seen, and hear with my own ears whatever there is to be heard. Will you do me this favour ? ”

“ My lady, I will go to the world’s end to serve you. But if I might venture to suggest, it would be better to defer this visit—say for a week. By that time the new-comer, if a new-comer be expected, will have probably arrived ; the old residenter, if there be an old residenter, will be less on her guard. For it was enough to startle any one seeking retirement to have had two strangers break in upon her in one day. A third visit so soon, especially by a lady, would create intense alarm.”

“ Nothing will induce me to delay my visit longer than till Saturday. This is Wednesday ;

an interval of two whole days is surely enough to put any lodging-house keepers off their guard. I couldn't live through a week in the state of anxiety and suspense into which your narrative has thrown me. You will go with me, won't you ? ”

“Certainly, my lady, I will go with you. But it will be necessary to act in this case with great caution. How does your ladyship propose to make the journey, for it's a good half-hour's journey by coach from the White Horse Cellar ? ”

“In my own carriage, to be sure ; how should I make it ? ”

“Pardon me, my lady, but I should not advise that, unless you wish your servants to get all sorts of strange ideas into their heads, if they do not see more than it might be desirable to show them.”

“True, true ! I hadn't thought of that. What do you advise ? ”

“That you manage in some way to get rid of the carriage and servants for a couple of hours, and make the journey with me, since your lady-

ship is so good as honour me thus far, in a post-chaise."

The lady mused, and was silent for a few minutes. A light appeared suddenly to penetrate into her mind, and she looked keenly at Mr Thompson while she said,—

"It will do—it will do admirably. There's a morning concert at Hanover Square Rooms on Saturday—one of those horrid entertainments which generally last two, or sometimes three, hours. I have not been to any place of the sort for years. But I'll take a ticket for Saturday. The concert begins at twelve. I would carry you with me, only the boys might expect to go also, and that would be inconvenient. You go before, and have a post-chaise ready at the further corner of the square. I'll send the carriage away, desiring it to meet me at Hookham's, in Bond Street—say at two o'clock. That will give us plenty of time to go to Tottenham and return after we shall have done our business. What do you say to that?"

"That no arrangement could possibly be better, if your ladyship is determined to run the risk."

"I should die if I did not hazard it."

Mr Thompson returned to his pupils. Her ladyship rang for Louise, that she might dress and be ready to receive the distinguished party which had been invited to dine that evening at Belmore House.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAST THROW.

MR BRACKENBURY woke next morning satisfied that he had done all, or nearly all, that it was possible for him to do. He did not forget that he had promised to call again at 39 St Ann Street, but then the thought naturally occurred to him, that if he kept his promise there was really nothing for him to say or to do. It was quite clear that M. de Couvré would never be persuaded to perpetrate what he held to be a breach of trust. It was equally certain that Mrs Todd stood in no need of further urging to maintain an attitude of prudent watchfulness. On the whole, therefore, he held it best to return without further delay to the country, and on that conclusion he acted. He

took his place in the day-coach, which started at nine in the morning, and without any mishap or adventure reached his own parsonage in time for an early supper. Next day he put his horse in the gig and drove over to Baddlesmere. His meeting with Lord Belmore agreed, in its general character, with that which had preceded his expedition to London. The two gentlemen spent their time quite by themselves, and most of it within the four walls of Lord Belmore's private room ; and on the morrow the rector returned home, where, for obvious reasons, we shall leave him.

Meanwhile Lady Belmore bore herself like a heroine. No one could have guessed, seeing her preside as she did single-handed over that dinner-table on the Wednesday, that there was the shadow of a care or anxiety on her mind. Not even the prying eyes of Louise could detect in her manner the slightest token of nervousness. So also, both before and after that symposium, she was in every respect mistress of herself. She gave clear directions for packing and making ready to go into the country early in the coming week. She

wrote to Mr Brackenbury's brother to prepare him for the speedy arrival of her sons, and let her lord know by letter that she had done so, and would probably be with him at the latest on the Thursday or Friday. Yet all the while there burned within her a fire that threatened to consume her—the intense desire to know her own destiny. She did not dare to hope that fate would be propitious to her. Everything, on the contrary, that had occurred of late, tended to produce an exactly opposite conclusion. The sudden appearance of Mr Brackenbury in town, his mysterious visit to No. 39, the fishing nature of his conversation with herself, and, above all, his connection with the villa in Tottenham Court Road,—all these incidents combined led to the assumption that there must be something going forward which she was not intended to know, and which, without doubt, concerned her very deeply. And what could that something be, unless it were the *liaison* hinted at in Mr Hogarth's story. And of all the pictures that could be presented to her diseased imagination that was the most hideous.

Still she went and came, indoors and out, with a countenance on which no ordinary observer could have traced the faintest token of the martyrdom she was suffering. Saturday, however, would end it one way or another, and she really did not care which direction the issue might take.

Saturday came at last, and, punctual to the time appointed, Lady Belmore got alone into her carriage. She was driven to Hanover Square Rooms, whence the coachman was directed to return home—an arrangement into which, considering the severity of the weather, he entered very willingly. The time and place for the rendezvous were fixed, and her ladyship made for the staircase crossing the hall.

“Shall I wait for you here, my lady?” asked the footman, touching his hat.

“No, John, it won’t be necessary. You can go home with the carriage, and return with it.”

John went away and her ladyship, after reaching the upper landing - place, turned suddenly round. She encountered, as she descended the steps again, more than one female face which in

other days would have courted from her the faintest sign of recognition, but which now looked cold upon her. She heard, or imagined that she heard, remarks uttered—some of them not in whispers—that were far from flattering. In spite of the greater pain that lay at her heart, these minor blows told upon her acutely. It was long since she had rubbed shoulders in such a place of resort as this with the world in its assumed respectability. To be stared at and to return the stare in the public streets or from the boxes of a theatre was one of the unavoidable conditions of her existence, and she had become accustomed to it. She had learned long ago to look proudly, under such circumstances, on all who affected to look proudly upon her. But to come into close personal contact with the familiar associates of other days, and to see them avert their eyes from her with open scorn,—that was an incident which had not before occurred to her, and which was the harder to bear up against at the present moment because she was alone. Poor woman ! it is scarcely too much to say that for the moment

a keen sense of personal degradation made her almost forget the far more bitter issue, in order to determine which she had thrown herself into her present very false position.

Lady Belmore elbowed her way through the well-dressed crowd, and gained the street. It was hard and firm in consequence of the frost, so that walking threatened no inconvenience ; but to walk alone in those days through a public thoroughfare was so unusual among ladies that people turned to stare at her. She was dressed in the very height of fashion, with long skirts to her upper robe ; yet not even a footman attended her.

“ I say, Jack,” exclaimed a beau of the first water, who was preparing to show himself in the concert-room, “ she’s a slasher that ! Do you know her ? ”

“ Know her ?—egad ! I should think I did,” replied the individual so addressed. “ She was once Lady Maitland ; she’s now, I believe, Lady Belmore. But I wouldn’t swear to that last fact ; she has probably left her second husband, just as she left her first.”

"Phew! is that the go?" replied his companion.
"Damme! she's very handsome. Suppose we feel her pulse?"

"You may if you please. I won't."

The last speaker, who was the elder of the two, thereupon turned aside and entered the rooms. The younger followed Lady Belmore and overtook her, just as, in crossing the square, she caught sight of a post-chaise which stood at the far corner. The young man placed himself at her side, and entered at once into conversation with her.

"Your ladyship has lost your escort. May I be permitted to supply his place?"

Lady Belmore took no notice, but walked on; whereupon the young man threw himself in front of her, and stared her full in the face.

"Will you permit me to pass?" she said, quite calmly. "I have not the honour of your acquaintance, and don't desire to make it here."

"Only the beginning of it, madam, here. We can easily find a more convenient *locale* for per-

fecting the intimacy. Allow me to offer you my arm."

"Sir!" exclaimed Lady Belmore, trying to hide her alarm, while she made no secret of her indignation; "you are either very impertinent, or very much mistaken. I don't know who you are, but you cannot be a gentleman, otherwise you would not thus interrupt and insult a lady whom you happen to find unprotected."

"I swear by the immortal gods, madam, that it is to supply the protection of the want of which you justly complain that I am here. You are extremely beautiful. It's not safe for you to walk the streets alone. Let me be your protector. Come, don't be shy and foolish!"

He followed up this address by seizing her hand and passing it under his arm. She struggled to free herself, suppressing, however, the scream which a natural impulse impelled her to utter. For, frightened as she was, the recollection of the business which she had in hand never left her; and of all things possible there was none which she dreaded more than becoming

the centre, at that moment, of a vulgar curiosity. The young man held her fast, and had actually dragged her half across the road, without the slightest apparent attention being paid to the proceeding, either by the company who continued to arrive at the entrance of the Rooms, or by the servants who crowded round it. Not that the proceeding was unobserved ; quite the reverse. Well-bred, well-dressed ladies, and gentlemen saw it, and were amused. They put their own construction on the scene—which was not a very delicate one, and bandied jokes one with another, some of them more broad than refined. But they did nothing more. Indeed it might have fared ill with Lady Belmore but that other eyes than theirs had been fixed upon her from the moment she extricated herself out of the throng at the door of the Rooms. The young man had dragged her half across the road, and was beckoning to a hackney-coach, the driver of which began to move towards him, when there was a rush, a cry, a blow as from a sledge-hammer, and down he fell, prone upon his back.

“Come on, my lady—come on! I could easily kill the scoundrel—as I probably shall, sooner or later; but you must not be seen here.”

Lady Belmore understood at once all that had happened. She took Mr Thompson’s arm, and ran with him towards the chaise, into which they jumped. The postboy received his instructions—the carriage drove off—and in five minutes, Hanover Square and all that appertained to it were out of sight. Was her mind at ease then? Far otherwise. Fresh difficulties seemed to be accumulating about her—new troubles rising. Did the blackguard who insulted her know who she was? And if he did not, could she flatter herself that, among the lookers-on, there might not be some to whom both what she was and what she had once been were familiar?

“I am the most miserable of women!” she exclaimed aloud. “Everything is against me. This scandal will kill me! How shall I survive it?”

“Forgive me, my lady,” said Mr Thompson, in

a low and even plaintive tone of voice ; "it is not so ; there is no scandal. The fellow was drunk—I saw it ; I think I know him, too. What he says and does affects no one for evil except himself. What happened to your ladyship might have happened to any one here in London. Pray don't distress yourself on that account."

"I know you mean me true ; you are my best friend, Mr Thompson, but you don't know all ; and you don't consider the effect of your interference in my defence, and of my escape with you thus. Will not these things be talked of to my great discredit by all that witnessed them ? Well," she continued, after a pause, which he did not venture to interrupt, "what does it signify ? I can't sink lower than I am, in their estimation at least. Let them talk—let them do their worst ; we have other things to think of now. Shall we soon be at the place?"

Mr Thompson could not resist the temptation to look round when he heard these last words uttered in a voice as calm as the breath of May. Lady Belmore had completely mastered her emo-

tion. There was no flush upon her cheek, no fire in her eye, no curl—half of shame half of anger—about her mouth, but over the whole countenance an expression of quiet, unimpassioned, resolute determination. It was on the door of his lips to say, "What a marvellous creature you are!" but he repressed the impulse. Like his companion, he abstracted his thoughts from the immediate past, and fixed them on the immediate future, such being, as his sober judgment told him, the very best compliment which he could pay to her self-command. His reply, therefore, amounted to no more than this,—that they would reach their destination in a very few minutes.

"Let us consider, then," she said, "our mode of proceeding. It will scarcely do, I think, for you to be the spokesman again. Your reappearance so soon after having been told that the woman was not at liberty to negotiate with any one, would be sure to excite suspicion. What is your opinion?"

"My opinion coincides with that of your lady-

ship. What I had thought of was—but perhaps your ladyship might be offended if I gave utterance to the thought ? ”

“ Oh no, surely not. Say whatever strikes you. We are in consultation now, you know.”

“ Well, my lady, it did occur to me that if your ladyship and I were to appear together, the servant might take us for the couple to whom——”

“ No,” interrupted Lady Belmore, with an involuntary shrinking which she could not hide, and a harsh, cold, proud ring in her voice, that went through poor Mr Thompson like a sword, “ that won’t do. Besides,” she continued, resuming her former confidential manner, “ you could not deceive the woman. She would recognise you immediately as her visitor of Wednesday last, and we should be sent away as impostors. I believe I must undertake it all myself. It will be best for you to keep out of sight entirely, while I gain admittance, if I can. Yes, I am sure that is the wisest arrangement.”

“ Very well, my lady, just as you please. I

can hide myself in the carriage easily enough while your ladyship makes the inquiries : only be so good as remember that the lodgings are let to a lady who may arrive any day within six months, and that an agreement has been entered into by the person who hired them that with no other person within that limit can any fresh negotiation be opened."

"Thanks for reminding me. You have given me the very cue that I needed. I don't think they'll balk us this time."

As Lady Belmore uttered these words, the postboy pulled up, and, looking round, informed her that he had reached his destination. He dismounted and opened the carriage-door, whereupon Lady Belmore alighted, leaving Mr Thompson ensconced in the corner nearest to the wall, and thus completely hidden. She rang the bell.

CHAPTER XXII.

NOT SUCCESSFUL.

LADY BELMORE rang the bell, but had to wait several minutes before the signal was answered. She rang a second time, whereupon, after a brief interval, steps sounded on the gravel, and the door in the wall was opened. A stolen glance satisfied Mr Thompson that the individual who presented herself was the same maid whom he had encountered, and by whom he had been repulsed, on the previous Wednesday. He therefore shrank back into his corner, but kept his ears open.

"Is the landlady at home?" asked Lady Belmore.

"Yes, ma'am; do you please to want her?"

"Yes ; I want to look over the house. Make way, young woman ; I want to see the house, I tell you !"

"The house is not to let, ma'am—the house is taken ; and missis bade me say that she was not at liberty to show it to strangers."

"I know all that," replied Lady Belmore. "The lady for whom it is taken may or may not come at any time within the next six months, and till six months are past you are not free to enter into negotiations with anybody else. You see I know all about it ; so pray stand aside and let me in."

"I'll tell missis what you say, ma'am. Please stand back, and don't try to hold the door open. I must shut it, ma'am — I must indeed ; my orders is very strict."

So saying, and by the exercise of a little violence, she pushed the door to, and locked it. Lady Belmore was angry, but prudence mastered anger. She stood still, waiting till further information should reach her. It came shortly.

The door was opened again, and this time an

elderly woman, dressed in black, confronted her, the maid standing behind.

"My servant tells me that you're acquainted with the conditions on which the house is let, and that you wish to see it, ma'am. May I ask whether you be the lady for whom it has been taken?"

This was a startling question. It implied one of two facts, which, in their turn, placed Lady Belmore between the horns of a dilemma. Either the house was not inhabited—in which case there was no discovery to be effected by penetrating into its interior—or it was inhabited; and in this case the landlady had laid for her a snare, into which she experienced the strongest possible inclination to rush. Again, if, under either circumstance, she said that she was not the lady for whom the house had been hired, then the door would certainly be closed upon her. If she said that she was the expected lodger, and thereby gained admission, would she not, in the event of the house being empty, put the parties whom she suspected of plotting against her on their guard,

and so defeat her own object? Lady Belmore weighed these rival considerations rapidly but carefully in her own mind, and came to the conclusion that it would serve her purpose best to evade the difficulty, if that were possible.

"You hold a written agreement, I believe," she said, "that ought to satisfy you of my right to see the lodgings."

"Yes, ma'am, if you be the lady for whom they're taken. But the lady's name is not mentioned in the agreement; and if it were, I shouldn't know that you were she unless you said so."

"Well, but the signature of the gentleman who made the bargain is attached to the deed; that ought to tell with you more than any statement of mine, for you wouldn't know, if I told you my name, whether I gave you the right name or not."

"I didn't ask for your name, ma'am; I shouldn't be any the wiser if you gave it. All I asked was, whether you were the lady for whom the lodgings have been taken. But if you know the name of the gentleman that took them, and will give it, I

won't object to show you the house, whether you be my future lodger or not."

"The gentleman that took the lodgings is Mr Brackenbury—the Rev. Thomas Brackenbury."

"No, ma'am, it was no such gentleman. But be he who he may, he warned me that possibly curious people would try to get inside my gates. It seems to me, ma'am, that you are one of those curious persons. I'm sorry I can't gratify your curiosity. Good morning."

Before Lady Belmore could collect her thoughts, far more remonstrate against the proceeding, the door was slammed in her face, and the sound of the key turning in the lock, followed by the tramp of retreating footsteps on the gravel, gave her clearly to understand that for that day, at all events, she had sustained a defeat. There was nothing for it but to re-enter the chaise, and to drive to Hookham's library in Bond Street, in the reading-room of which she spent a long and dreary hour waiting for her own carriage to carry her back to Belmore House.

Baffled, mortified, humiliated, Lady Belmore

spent the remainder of that day, and the whole of the Sunday which succeeded, within doors. She held a long consultation with Mr Thompson, which ended only in this,—that for the present their game was a lost one, and that little else remained for them, in the future, than to keep their eyes open. Her longer continuance in town would be useless. Her thoughts of Baddlesmere, and the absolute seclusion from society which a protracted residence there implied, were indeed hard to bear ; yet, under existing circumstances, even these great evils were not absolutely without compensation. In the first place, if Lord Belmore's object in carrying her thither was to facilitate his own schemes, such as she believed them to be, he would find himself mistaken. Mr Thompson was not going to Baddlesmere ; neither had she any intention whatever of allowing that most deserving person to retire from the service of the house of Belmore. She had already applied for and obtained her husband's permission to install him as curator of his lordship's valuable library ; and upon the duties of that

office he would enter as soon as his pupils should be fairly launched at Eton. But, over and above the salary, Mr Thompson became entitled, as librarian, to apartments in Belmore House. It would thus be impossible for his lordship to visit London, even for a day, without her being made acquainted with the circumstance; nor to go forth upon secret expeditions, except under the eye of a most vigilant observer. On the whole, therefore, assuming his lordship's game to be such as she believed it to be, there seemed a better chance for her to follow and counterwork it from the country, than if she remained a constant resident in town. On the other hand, the scandal, should such be raised, about her adventure in Hanover Square, and the mode of her deliverance from it, would run its course and die out without attracting her lord's notice. Thus, odious as was the prospect of spending months—it might be years—in a place where nobody would visit her, where few of her own sex with whom she could associate would ever speak to her, its horrors were mitigated by the reflection,

that she was more likely there than anywhere else to get rid of the one burden which made life intolerable. There was something to look forward to in this.

What said Mr Thompson to all this ? He was well pleased to obtain an office so lucrative and respectable as that which her ladyship had procured for him. It was in every respect more to his taste than the work of a clergyman in town or country. For Mr Thompson's creed was neither longer nor deeper than that of the noble persons whom he served ; and his prospects in the Church were scarcely bright enough to reconcile him to a life of hypocrisy and self-restraint. To be cut off, however, from all intercourse with Lady Belmore—not to see her day by day—not to hear her speak, even if she spoke rudely to him—that was a prospect from contemplating which he shrank with agony. For over him, even more surely than over Mr Hogarth, she had thrown her spell, of which the hold was the severer that neither by word nor deed could he dare to make its existence perceptible. He

♦

had not been a bad man when he came into the household. Humbly born, educated at the expense of strangers, first at the Blue-coat School, by-and-by as a servitor at the university, he had been designed by his mother, whom he mainly supported in her widowhood, for the ministry ; previously to entering which, Lord Belmore, under whom Mr Thompson's father had held a farm, took him into his family to be tutor to his sons. At first he did his duty to the lads. But their mother's queenly beauty took captive his imagination, and, in a passionate love for her, all other sentiments and feelings were absorbed. He became careless in his proper work, indifferent to the exercises of that religion of which not the faintest ray lighted up either Baddlesmere or Belmore House, a willing recipient of those loose views both of faith and practice which came to him at second-hand. It was not long after he had given himself up absolutely to these engrossing ideas, that Lady Belmore's suspicions respecting her husband's fidelity began to manifest themselves. How he contrived to master her secret, and to

what uses he turned his knowledge, our readers are already aware. This alone, in connection with these points, it remains to convey to them. He had seen that miniature which took the original of it so cruelly aback, removed from its place over Lord Belmore's chimney-piece, and thrust away, as a thing of no value, into a writing-desk which its owner rarely used. Of the key of that desk he contrived on one occasion to get possession ; and daily, and ten times a-day, under the pretext of studying in the library, he would take it from its hiding-place and worship before it.

Mr Thompson, so feeling, so thinking, could not but contemplate the departure of Lady Belmore into the country with very bitter anguish. Still he also had his grounds of consolation. He had gained her confidence on a very delicate point. He would preserve it as long as he lived. He would watch over her interests, or what she believed to be her interests, with all the vigilance of which he was capable, and be more than rewarded for his utmost labours by a word of kindly approval. So, at least, he said to himself.

Might there not be a thought beyond this which as yet he could not venture to contemplate in its embodiment? Who can tell? All that we know for certain is that, grieving yet grateful, mourning yet not without comfort, he made up his mind to see the sun of his existence go down for a season, and in his loneliness to think, act, wake, sleep, only with one end in view—to do her service.

Lady Belmore remained in town three or four days subsequently to the events recorded in the foregoing pages. Instead of herself carrying her sons to Eton, she sent them there in Mr Thompson's charge, and on his return took him over the suite of apartments which he was henceforth to consider as his own. To the housekeeper and the other servants to whose care Belmore House was to be intrusted, she gave strict orders that Mr Thompson's comforts were in every way to be consulted. Meanwhile Bruce put everything in order for the coming journey. *Fourgons* and waggons were loaded with such goods as it was considered desirable to transfer to the country;

and on the day appointed for that important step, her ladyship, with Louise, took her place inside the family coach ; while Bruce upon the box, and a couple of footmen in the rumble, all well armed, guarded and attended them. They had wretched weather for their journey. The frost had given away, heavy rains set in, and the fields were flooded. It took them three whole days to plough their way through roads knee-deep in mud for the horses, and they reached the place of their destination at last, out of humour, out of heart, jaded and weary.

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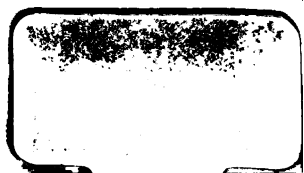
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